PATTERNS OF POWER · SPARTA

NOTHING TO RENT

Sparta and the helots — a landscape and twelve modules on a conquest that found no throne to enter, no elite to buy and no revenue to capture

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held as tested, not revealed

PREFACE

What the study is for, how it was built, and the discipline it holds

The spine

Every other study in this collection has a metropole in it. There is a capital across a sea, a public that pays for the conquest and must be reconciled to it, a despatch that says one thing and a district officer who does another, and an ocean wide enough to keep the two accounts from meeting. It is reasonable to suspect that the machinery this project has been describing is an artefact of that geometry — that the reversed robe, the withheld formation, the seam, the managed reputation, are what happens when a modern state governs at a distance, and would dissolve if the distance were removed.

Sparta removes it. The conquerors and their home audience were the same few thousand men, standing in the same valley, four miles from the fields they had taken. There was no metropole, no sea, no electorate, no bureaucracy, no coinage, no capital city, no written law and, for most of the period, no writing at all. The subject population spoke the same language, worshipped the same gods, and lived one mountain away. And the machinery runs anyway — every piece of it.

That is why this case is in the collection, and it is why it was worth the labour. Sparta is the control.

The study's own finding, arrived at in the landscape and confirmed at every subsequent stage, is narrower and harder than the general point. When the Spartans came over the pass into Messenia they walked into a country that contained nothing they could rent. The earlier state there — a literate palace order that had assessed sixteen districts and written down what each owed — had burned four centuries before and had never been replaced. There was no throne to enter, no elite to buy, no priesthood to redirect, no tax roll to capture. Every unit of the Messenian surplus that reached a Spartan therefore had to be taken by a Spartan, in person, from a household, and defended by force on the ground, for as long as the arrangement lasted.

Everything the Greek world found so extraordinary about Sparta — the men permanently under arms, the common messes, the upbringing that began at seven, the readiness that no other city could copy — is the bill for that. Not a philosophy, not a national character, not the design of a lawgiver. The running cost of having conquered a country with nothing in it to rent.

How it was built

One module at a time, verification first, over the arc the Field Manual sets out: a landscape and twelve modules, each with a framework function, each contributing a revision or a refinement back to the framework rather than merely applying it.

The evidence in this case is worse than in any other the collection has attempted, and the study says so on the face of the modules rather than smoothing it over. Sparta wrote nothing about itself. Every substantial surviving account was written by a foreigner — an Ionian, two Athenians, a Macedonian resident in Athens, a Boeotian five centuries late — and most of them were admirers, admitted to a country that expelled other visitors. The narrative of the conquest reaches us only through a Roman-period compilation of Hellenistic literary treatments. Whole categories of institution, including the upbringing and the equal allotments, are known to have been reconstructed centuries after the fact for audiences with reasons of their own. Where that is so, this study dates the source rather than repeating the tradition.

Public-domain primary material — the fragments of Tyrtaeus, the Great Rhetra, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Aristotle, Plutarch, Pausanias — is quoted exactly, in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century translations that are themselves out of copyright, because the precise wording of a legal fiction is the point. Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased and credited, never quoted at length. Where wording or provenance could not be confirmed, the line was dropped rather than guessed. Contested figures — and in this study nearly every figure is contested — are given as ranges with the reason for the dispute attached, and no population or casualty number is offered where none can be supported.

Two things the study wanted and did not get are recorded rather than papered over. There is no Messenian source of any kind, from any of the four centuries in question, and the modules on information and on the accounting are built around that absence rather than around an estimate. And the arithmetic of the render — whether a helot owed half his crop or a fixed measure of it — cannot be settled from the sources, so it is settled, so far as it is settled at all, from behaviour, and the residue of doubt is stated.

The discipline

Legibility is not pardon.

To explain that the Spartan order was the most successful solution to the coordination problem in the Greek world is not to grant that it was just. To record that a helot kept his family, his plot and his village where an Athenian chattel slave kept none of them is not to make Sparta the milder place; it is to identify what kind of order

it was, which is the only question this project asks. To say that the men who ran it believed in it entirely — that the Spartiate who cut a farmer's throat in a dark field had been formed from the age of seven by every adult he passed, and needed no bad faith at all — is not a mitigation. It is the mechanism, and it is the more disturbing finding rather than the more comfortable one, because an order that had to be run by cynics would not have lasted a generation.

Both columns stand. Neither cancels the other. Carrying both at once is the whole of the method.

The arithmetic is laid out. The sum is left to the reader.

The arc

Landscape · Good to Plough and Good to Plant. The country on the eve — a Bronze Age state four centuries in the ash, two valleys of villages that had never re-pooled their coordination into anything a stranger could seize, and the commonest move in the archaic Greek world, taken here further than anywhere.

1 · No Impiety in Slaying Them. *The floor of force.* The magistrates entered office each year by declaring war on the people who grew the food, so that killing them would carry no pollution — and the floor beneath it rested not on a monopoly of weapons but on a monopoly of drill.

2 · A Bushel of Barley Meal a Month. *The settlement.* The equal Lycurgan allotments were a third-century invention with a political job to do; the land was private, heritable and concentrating, and what was uniform was not the estate but a monthly delivery of food that alone conferred citizenship.

3 · Law Is the Master Whom They Own. *The robe.* A legitimating story of extraordinary reach, addressed to the Spartiates, to the allies, to the whole Greek world and to Delphi — and never once to the people whose labour the arrangement stood on.

4 · Their Masters Did Not Allow It. *Formation.* The most complete apparatus for making people that any Greek city built, aimed without exception at the ruling caste; and, pointed at the majority, a different instrument altogether, which installed a boundary and had to be reapplied for ever.

5 · No Man Would Give Him a Light for His Fire. *The cost column.* Five ledgers in one small country, held by five different mechanisms — and the discovery that an exit is not a door but a destination, which is why a crossable mountain changed nothing for four hundred years.

6 · There Is No Money in the Treasury. *Extraction.* A chain one link long, in an order that took the harvest of two fertile regions for three centuries and built no city,

no fleet, no coinage and no reserve, because the whole of it was eaten in the evening in a room.

7 · They Chiselled Off the Verses. *Information and suppression.* An order with no metropole to deceive, managing its reputation before a horizontal field of rival cities — while the country on the other side of the seam produced not one surviving line in four hundred years.

8 · All the Parts of the State Must Wish That It Should Exist. *Elite coordination and the default.* Aristotle states the principle himself, share by share; and the same completeness that prevented four centuries of usurpation also ensured that nobody had the standing to fix the thing that was killing them.

9 · Greater, in That It Will Last Longer. *Plurality or foreclosure.* One real concession, made from strength by a king who calculated that a smaller kingship held longer was worth more — and then four hundred years in which no faction was ever weak enough to have to buy anyone.

10 · The Ephors Did Not Stop the Chorus. *Change and collapse.* The largest servile rising in Greek history changed nothing; an afternoon between two hoplite armies changed everything; and the decisive act was construction rather than combat.

11 · The Only Number Anyone Wrote Down. *The grim accounting.* The single quantified mass death in four centuries counts the conquerors and was caused by an earthquake — and the metabolic note was never called, because an order that builds nothing owes nothing when it falls.

12 · Not So Strong as the Messenian Wall. *Convergence and divergence.* The same answer reached independently in forty valleys, what this case shares with the collection and where it breaks from it, and the strongest defence of Sparta stated in full and answered.

GOOD TO PLOUGH AND GOOD TO PLANT

Landscape · the country on the eve of the conquest — a Bronze Age state four centuries in the ash, two river valleys of villages that had never re-pooled their coordination into anything a stranger could seize, and the commonest move in the archaic Greek world, taken here further than anywhere

Two valleys and a wall of rock

The whole of what follows is shaped by a fact of ground. The southern Peloponnese is cut lengthwise by the Taygetus massif, a hundred kilometres of limestone running from the Arcadian highlands to Cape Matapan and rising at Profitis Ilias to a little over 2,400 metres — the highest point in the Peloponnese, snow-covered into late spring, crossable in antiquity only by a handful of passes and by the coastal skirt at its southern end. East of the wall lies the Eurotas rift, some eighty kilometres long and at most seventeen wide, a narrow floor of good land between Taygetus and the lower Parnon range, with Sparta sitting on the eastern foothills at a ford. West of the wall lies the basin of the Pamisos, shorter but broader and better watered, opening south to the Messenian Gulf: the plain of Stenyclerus in the north, the lower Pamisos plain below it, and beyond, toward the Ionian sea, the rolling country around the Bay of Navarino. To a farmer of the eighth century the arithmetic was plain. The Eurotas floor was sufficient and no more; the Pamisos basin was the better prize, and it was one mountain away.

That single geographical relation supplies both the temptation and the trap. The land the Spartans would take was close enough to hold and far enough to be difficult — near enough that its harvest could be carried over the pass into Laconian storerooms, far enough that the men who guarded it could not be at home the same day. Sparta's whole later shape, the permanent readiness that the Greek world found so strange, is downstream of a mountain.

The Spartans said what they wanted in verse, and they said it early. Tyrtaeus, writing at Sparta in the seventh century and quoted afterwards by Pausanias and Strabo, called the prize *Messene good to plough and good to plant*, and named the king in whose reign it had been won — *"To our king beloved of the gods, Theopompus, through whom we took Messene with wide dancing-grounds."* The conquered told the same story from the

other side. Pausanias, setting out the Messenian version of the war's causes, records their charge plainly: that the pretexts were nothing, and that in truth the Lacedaemonians *"had formed designs on their country through covetousness, as in others of their actions."* The conqueror's poetry and the conquered's accusation name the identical object. There is no gap here to be opened between the public reason and the private one, because on this point there was never a private one. What was wanted was ploughland, and everybody said so.

The order that was already ash

The framework's standing rule is that a conqueror never meets a timeless or aboriginal baseline: what he finds is an earlier conquest that has been naturalised until it looks simply like the way the world is. Messenia obeys the rule and then breaks it in a way worth stating carefully, because the break is the most important single fact in this landscape.

There had been a state in Messenia, and a formidable one. On the hill of Ano Englianos, above the Bay of Navarino, a palace was built shortly after 1300 BC that administered something close to the whole region — the Hither and Further Provinces of its own records, sixteen districts in all, each with named centres and assessed obligations. It was a literate, accounting order. Its clerks wrote in Linear B on unbaked clay, and about a thousand documents survive from the site because a fire preserved what was meant to be temporary. They record a *wanax* at the apex, a class of officers below him, land held in two registered categories whose exact difference is still argued among specialists, obligatory renders of grain and flax and cloth, workshops assigned their rations, women and children listed by trade, and men described by a word — *do-e-ro* — that means something on the slave side of dependent. Whatever else it was, it was a machine for turning the labour of a countryside into stores at a centre, and it had scribes, a survey, and a chain of officials to make that happen.

Around 1200 BC it burned, and the hill was abandoned. The great destructions of that generation ended the palace order across the Aegean, and the script went with the palaces: no one in Greece wrote anything for something like four centuries. What that means for this study is precise and it is not a matter of atmosphere. When Spartan spearmen came over the pass in the eighth century they were not walking into a naturalised former conquest that had reached the pole at which an order runs on the conviction of the governed and can therefore be captured cheaply by taking its apex. They were walking into the site of a former conquest that had been destroyed and not replaced. There was no throne to enter, no archive to inherit, no priesthood with regional reach whose word could be redirected, no tax roll to take over, no king whose

right to appoint and depose could be exercised by a stranger. The apparatus that had once pooled the region's coordination into a single seizable point had been ash for four hundred years.

Four hundred years of villages

What lay between the fire and the conquest was not nothing, but it was small. The best-excavated Messenian site of those centuries is Nichoria, on a ridge above the Messenian Gulf, probably one of the district centres named in the Pylos tablets and reduced after the collapse to a modest settlement — a place with a chief's hall and a few tens of families rather than a bureaucracy. The regional surveys that have worked western Messenia since the 1960s find patchy, discontinuous occupation through those centuries, and the specialists differ sharply over how much of the apparent thinness is real depopulation and how much is the difficulty of seeing poor pottery in a ploughed field. What nobody finds is a successor state. There is no evidence of a regional apex in Messenia between the fall of the palace and the arrival of the Spartans, and no clear archaeological sign of a regional cohesion that would make "Messenia" a political thing rather than a stretch of country.

The conquerors, at the moment they set out, were not much grander. Sparta of the tenth and ninth centuries may have looked a good deal like Nichoria. It became a state by the ordinary archaic route of villages agreeing to act together: four settlements on the Eurotas — Pitana, Mesoa, Limnai and Kynosoura — joined in the eighth century, with Amyklai, four kilometres south, brought in afterwards; the two royal houses appear to correspond to the two halves of that merger, the Agiads burying in one and the Eurypontids in another, which is the likeliest plain explanation of a double kingship that later Greeks found so peculiar. Sparta never fully digested the arrangement, and never troubled to build itself a city. Thucydides, writing when Spartan power was at its height, thought the fact worth a warning to posterity: if Lacedaemon were deserted and only the temples and the foundations of the public buildings were left, he said, later ages would be strongly disposed to disbelieve that her fame matched her power — and yet the Spartans *"occupy two-fifths of Peloponnese and lead the whole,"* while their city, *"neither consolidated nor adorned with magnificent temples and public edifices, but settled in villages in the old way of Hellas,"* would appear inadequate. The observation is usually quoted for its irony about ruins. Read as evidence it says something harder: the state that took and held the largest subject population in Greece never converted its own centre into a monument, and had no need to, because its coordination did not run through buildings.

So the encounter on the eve of the conquest is between two societies at similar scale and similar simplicity: village clusters on either side of a mountain, one of which had lately learned to act as one and the other of which had not. The asymmetry that decided the outcome was not civilisation against barbarism in either direction. It was the difference between a set of villages that had combined and a set of villages that had not.

Zeus gave this city to the Heraclidae

The Spartans nonetheless arrived carrying a title, and the earliest surviving line of Spartan poetry is that title stated. Strabo quotes from Tyrtaeus's elegy *Eunomia* the claim that the land was a divine grant to a returning line: *"For the son of Kronos, spouse of Hera of the beautiful crown, Zeus himself, hath given the city to the Heracleidae, in company with whom I left windy Erineus, and came to the broad island of Pelops."* This is the Dorian migration in its oldest datable form — the story that the Peloponnese belongs to the descendants of Heracles, who came down from the north to take back what was theirs by descent, and that the Dorians came with them.

Whether any such migration happened is one of the long-running questions of Greek archaeology, and the honest answer is that the material record has never produced the invasion the story describes; most current scholarship treats the migration as a legend of origin rather than an event, without being able to rule out movements of population it would be difficult to see. For this study the question of its truth is secondary to the question of its function, and the function is legible in the grammar. The claim converts a seizure into a repossession. It says that the takers are not takers, that the land was granted before they came for it, and that what looks like conquest is the recovery of an inheritance. It is, in the plainest sense, a deed of title issued in advance by a god — the same instrument that later empires would write as a charter, performed here in hexameters at a festival.

Two things about that instrument matter now and will matter more later. The first is its audience. The poem is addressed to Spartans; the pronoun is *we*; it recites to men who will fight that the ground they are taking was theirs. Nothing in it is aimed at the people who lived on the ground. The second is that Sparta had no metropole. There was no distant capital whose taxpayers and voters had to be reconciled to the enterprise, no sea across which awkward facts could be kept from an anxious public. The conquerors and the home audience were the same few thousand men, and the story was told to their own faces. That the robe should nonetheless face inward, toward the army rather than the conquered, is therefore not a product of distance here, since there is no distance; a first observation, to be tested rather than asserted, is that a legitimating

story turns toward the rulers' own people whenever the conquered's belief is not needed, and that geography merely makes the turn easier to see.

The commonest move in the archaic world

It is essential to the honesty of this case that Sparta not be introduced as an aberration. Reducing conquered neighbours to hereditary agricultural dependence was, in the two centuries either side of 700 BC, among the most ordinary things a successful Greek community did. The evidence is scattered and late, but it is consistent: Sicyon had its *katōnakē*-wearers, named for a slave's garment; Argos had the *gymnētes*, the naked people, admitted to citizenship only after a catastrophe had killed the citizens who outranked them; Thessaly had the *penestai*; Crete had *mnoia* and *klarotai* in city after city; Syracuse had the Killyrioi, Byzantium held the Bithynians in a relation that a later historian said was the same as Sparta's with the helots, and Heraclea Pontica had the Mariandynians. Hans van Wees, surveying the whole set, concludes that Sparta's conquest of Messenia was not an anomaly but the most spectacular and best documented instance of a form of imperialism characteristic of the archaic age, with the earliest datable conquests of the type falling in the eighth century and the latest around 580–560.

That men in similar positions, unable to coordinate with one another and mostly unaware of one another's arrangements, reached the same answer is exactly what should be expected and requires no hidden hand to explain: there were only so many things to do with a defeated neighbour who farmed good land, and taking the land while leaving the farmer on it was the one that paid without requiring anyone to learn a new trade. The archaic Greeks were capable of saying so. A Cretan drinking song of the sixth century, attributed to one Hybrias and preserved by Athenaeus, states the whole doctrine in five lines:

> *ἔστι μοι πλοῦτος μέγας δόρυ καὶ ξίφος*
> *καὶ τὸ καλὸν λαισήϊον, πρόβλημα χρωτός·*
> *τούτῳ γὰρ ἀρῶ, τούτῳ θερίζω,*
> *τούτῳ πατέω τὸν ἁδὺν οἶνον ἀπ' ἀμπέλω,*
> *τούτῳ δεσπότας μνοΐας κέκλημαι.*

I have great wealth — a spear and a sword and the fine leather shield that guards the skin; for with this I plough, with this I reap, with this I tread the sweet wine from the vine, with this I am called master of the serfs. The singer goes on that those who dare not carry spear and sword fall at his knee and call him master and great king. It is the position stated without ornament by a man standing in it: the weapon is the farming

implement, because it is what compels the farming. Nothing in Sparta's arrangement would have surprised him.

Helos, and the men who were helots first

Before Messenia there was Laconia, and here the record fails in an instructive way. The Greeks themselves did not know how their subject population had come into being, and told at least four irreconcilable stories about it. Antiochus of Syracuse, in the late fifth century and the earliest of them, said that during the Messenian war those Lacedaemonians who did not join the expedition were judged slaves and named helots — an internal punishment for disobedience, not a conquest at all. Ephorus, a century later, had the Dorians divide Laconia among themselves and the people of Helos reduced afterwards for revolting. Theopompus made them pre-Dorian natives subjected at the migration. Pausanias made them pre-Dorian natives of Helos conquered around 700 by the same kings who began the Messenian war. The dates in these accounts differ by four hundred years and the mechanism by everything. As van Wees observes, the sheer incompatibility is itself the finding: no reliable memory of the origin survived, and each version was manufactured to serve a later argument. The etymology shares the problem — the ancients derived *heilōtai* from Helos, the marsh town of the southern plain, while the likelier derivation is from the verb meaning to take captive, and neither can be proved.

What can be said is that a status existed and was recognised as a category before the Messenians entered it. In the tradition of the first war the Spartans taunt the Messenians as being already their slaves, *no freer than the Helots* — the insult only works if the word already named a known thing. Alongside it stood a third category which was there from the beginning and which the whole later structure depends on: the *perioikoi*, the dwellers-around, communities of free men in their own towns, self-governing in local matters, without any voice in Spartan decisions, obliged to serve in the army and, in time, doing nearly all the crafts, the trade and the seafaring that Spartiates would not do. The same tradition records them in the field in the first war — the Lacedaemonians fielding, beside their own, *the neighbouring peoples already reduced and serving in their ranks*. Strabo would later report that Laconia had once been called the country of a hundred cities and that in his own day some thirty towns remained outside Sparta. The figures are impressionistic, but the structure they describe is not: a country of many small communities, of which one had made itself the state and the rest had been sorted into two conditions, one that kept its town and its freedom and lost its politics, and one that lost everything but its plough.

The twenty years, and what was imposed at the end of them

The narrative of the Messenian wars comes to us almost entirely through Pausanias, writing in the second century AD and working from Myron of Priene and from an epic by Rhianus of Bene — that is, a Roman-period compilation of Hellenistic literary treatments of an archaic war. It is not evidence in the ordinary sense, and its most memorable episodes, the seer struck blind and restored, the hero carried down a chasm by an eagle and led out by a fox, are the marks of a tradition that had become a national epic before it was ever a history. The dates it supplies are Olympiad reckonings of the same character: the seizure of the border town of Ampheia in 743, the abandonment of Ithome and the end of the first war in 724, the revolt thirty-nine years later in 685. Modern reconstructions commonly place the conquest a decade or two later than Pausanias does, in the range 735 to 715, and the second war in the seventh century where Tyrtaeus belongs; the chronology should be held as a range and not a date.

What survives from close to the events is Tyrtaeus, and it amounts to a handful of lines. He gives a twenty-year war fought by *the warrior fathers of our fathers — "Around it they fought unceasingly for nineteen years, ever maintaining a stout heart"* — and its end: *"But in the twentieth year they left their rich tilled lands, and fled from out the lofty mountains of Ithome."* That is the whole contemporary record of the conquest: a duration, a mountain, and the departure of the people who had farmed the ground.

Two further fragments describe what was done with those who did not depart, and these are the most important primary evidence in the case:

> *ὥσπερ ὄνοι μεγάλοις ἄχθεσι τειρόμενοι,*
> *δεσποσύνοισι φέροντες ἀναγκαίης ὕπο λυγρῆς*
> *ἥμισυ παντὸς ὅσον καρπὸν ἄρουρα φέρει.*

Like asses worn down by great burdens, bringing to their masters, under grievous necessity, half of all the fruit the ploughland bears. And, on the obligation of mourning: *wailing for their masters, they and their wives alike, whenever the baneful doom of death came upon any.* Pausanias, quoting both, sets beside them the terms he understood to have been imposed: an oath never to rebel; no fixed tribute, but half of all the produce of their fields brought to Sparta; and a requirement that men come from Messene with their wives, in black, to the funerals of Spartan kings and magistrates, with a penalty on those who failed to come. The last is corroborated from an independent direction, since Herodotus describes the Spartan royal funeral as a compulsory assembly of Spartiates, of a fixed number of the subject neighbours from every part of Laconia, and of the helots — many thousands, men and women together, beating their foreheads

and lamenting without stint and saying always that the last king was the best of all their kings.

The register of that render deserves attention. A half-share of the crop is not tribute in the ordinary sense of a sum owed by a community to a state; it is the landlord's share, owed by a household to a named man. Whether it was a proportion or a fixed quota is disputed in the sources themselves — Pausanias says explicitly that no fixed tribute was imposed, while later authors describe standing measures of barley owed to a master and his wife — and the difference is not academic, since a proportion takes the whole of a bad year with the good and leaves the cultivator no upside, whereas a quota leaves him whatever he can raise above it. That question belongs to a later module. What belongs here is the shape: not a levy on a defeated country, but a private relation between a household and a man, repeated a few thousand times.

There is one detail in the tradition that reveals more than the battle narratives around it. During the first war, Pausanias says, the Lacedaemonians raided into Messenia but *"did no harm to the country, regarding it as their own, nor did they cut down trees or demolish buildings,"* driving off cattle and carrying away the corn but leaving the orchards and the farms standing. Whatever its authority as reportage, it describes with precision the difference between a raid and an annexation. Men who intend to own a field do not burn it. And the oath the tradition puts in their mouths before the first attack says the same in the other grammar: that neither the length of the war nor their disasters would deter them *"until they won the land of Messenia by the sword."*

Who the Messenians were

One more thing must be said before the modules begin, because getting it wrong would distort everything after. It is tempting to describe the conquest as the subjugation of a nation, and to imagine four centuries of a people holding its identity in secret until the Thebans came. The evidence does not support the picture in that form. Nino Luraghi's work has made the case that Messenia as a unified region with a common identity did not exist before the conquest to be conquered, that the archaeology shows no regional cohesion in the late Dark Age, and that the material culture, cults and language of archaic Messenia are indistinguishable from Laconia's — so that the Messenian identity which produced a state in 369 was to a great extent forged during and after subjection, not preserved through it, with the free communities of the region playing a large part in its making. Others read the continuities of tomb cult and the persistence of the name in fifth-century writers, who speak of wars against Messenians rather than against helots, as evidence of a real and

continuous self-understanding. The dispute is live and will bear on the ending of this study.

The framework's discipline applies with full force here and cuts against the easy conclusion in both directions. That an identity was made rather than inherited does not make it false or its holders dupes; a thing that was built and then became real is more durable than a lie, not less, and the Messenians who built a city under Ithome in 369 and held it were not performing a fiction. Equally, an identity forged under subjection is evidence about what subjection does, not evidence that there was nothing there before. What can be stated without controversy is that people farmed those valleys before Sparta came, that they had their own arrangements, and that whatever those arrangements were, they were not preserved as a going concern under Spartan rule but replaced by a relation between a household and a master.

Reading the landscape against the framework

The corpus asks of every conquest a single early question, because it predicts the shape of everything that follows: did the order the conqueror found vest its coordination in something a stranger could enter and operate? Two answers have so far been documented. The Sokoto Caliphate had vested the power to make and unmake its own elite in an office, and Lugard simply sat down in it and ran the instrument for sixty years at one political officer per hundred thousand subjects. The Kikuyu order had never pooled its authority into any apex at all, distributing it across age, lineage and consent, so Britain had to forge collaborators who carried no warrant, and paid for the forgery with the pass, the emergency and the camp.

Sparta supplies a third state of that variable, and it is not a variant of the second. Messenia had possessed an apex — a literate, surveying, office-bearing state that assessed sixteen districts and wrote down what each owed. That apex had been destroyed four centuries before the Spartans came, and nothing of regional reach had grown in its place. The distinction from the Kikuyu case is real and it predicts differently: an order whose coordination is live but distributed presents the conqueror with authority he must work against, whereas a ruin presents him with an absence he must work *into*. What Sparta found was a cleared field, and the corpus should record plainly that a cleared field is the worst ground a conqueror can be handed if what he wants is revenue, because there is nobody standing on it with the standing to deliver any. There was no one to co-opt, since there were no regional notables; no chair to assume, since the chair had burned; no creed to redirect, since the cults were local; and no fiscal stream to capture, since nothing had collected one since the Bronze Age. Every unit of the Messenian surplus that reached a Spartan would therefore have to be taken by a

Spartan, from a household, in person, and defended by force on the ground, in perpetuity.

That is the generative fact of this study, and it should be held rather than restated. The corpus has previously read "no chair" as an inconvenience the conqueror discovers and must pay around. Sparta is the case where it is the origin of an entire social order: the permanent body of men under arms, the messes, the withdrawal of Spartiates from every trade, the readiness the Greek world thought unnatural — all of it is the running cost of having taken a country with nothing in it to rent. Where the framework expects an expensive-pole conquest laid over a cheap-pole order that ran on conviction, Sparta laid an expensive conquest over ground where the cheap order had already collapsed, and had to supply from its own body every function the vanished apparatus would otherwise have performed. The prediction to be tested through the twelve modules is that this, and not any peculiarity of Dorian character, is what made Sparta Spartan.

Two smaller notes are carried forward for testing rather than claimed. The first is that the legitimating story here faced the conquerors from its earliest surviving line, in a case with no metropole, no sea, and no distance to hide anything behind — which suggests that a robe turns toward the rulers' own people not because distance permits it but because the conquered's belief is not required, distance being an amplifier and not the cause. The second is that this conquest was one instance of a move being made all over the Greek world in the same two centuries by communities that could not coordinate and mostly did not know of one another, which is convergence of the ordinary kind: not a spirit of the age, but a few thousand men in a few dozen similar positions, each with a narrow set of visible options, most of them taking the one that paid. Sparta's divergence is not that it made the move. It is how far it carried it, and what it had to become in order to keep what it took.

A note on sources. The exact quotations here are public-domain primary material. Tyrtaeus is quoted through the authors who preserve him: fragment 2 West from Strabo 8.4.10 (the grant to the Heraclidae and the departure from windy Erineus), and fragments 5, 6 and 7 West from Pausanias 4.6.5, 4.13.6, 4.15.2 and 4.14.5, in W. H. S. Jones's translation — "Messene good to plough and good to plant," the nineteen years and "the warrior fathers of our fathers," the flight from Ithome in the twentieth year, the asses bearing half the fruit of the ploughland, and the compelled wailing for masters. The Greek of the asses fragment is given as Edmonds prints it; editions differ in small points of the third line (Pausanias's manuscripts and West's text diverge over *παντὸς ὅσον* against *πᾶν ὅσσων*), and nothing in the argument turns on the variant. The Song of Hybrias is Poetae Melici Graeci 909 Page, preserved at Athenaeus 15.695f–696a; the Greek follows Bowra's text and the translation is given plainly rather than in

the Victorian verse renderings. Thucydides 1.10.2 on Sparta settled in villages is Crawley's translation; Herodotus 6.58 on the royal funerals is Rawlinson's; Herodotus 1.66 on the fetters carried to Tegea, cited here only in passing, is Godley's. Pausanias 4.4–4.14 supplies the Messenian war narrative, the Spartan oath to win the land by the sword, the raiding that spared the trees and buildings, the Messenian charge of covetousness, the taunt that the Messenians were no freer than the Helots, the neighbouring peoples already reduced and serving in the ranks, and the terms imposed after the war; the whole of it is a second-century-AD compilation from Myron of Priene and Rhianus of Bene and is treated throughout as tradition, not testimony. Strabo 8.4.11 gives the hundred cities of Laconia and the thirty of his own day. Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: Hans van Wees on conquest-serfdom across archaic Greece and on the incompatibility of the four ancient accounts of helot origins; Nino Luraghi on the construction of Messenian identity and on the perioikic population of archaic Messenia, with the opposing continuity reading noted; Stephen Hodkinson on the render and on Spartan landholding; the Pylos excavations and the Linear B corpus for the Bronze Age state, with the ki-ti-me-na and ke-ke-me-na land categories flagged as disputed among specialists rather than resolved here; the University of Minnesota Messenia Expedition and the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project for the settlement record, including the suggestion that the mid-eighth-century abandonment of Nichoria reflects Spartan aggression, which is an inference and is marked as one. Dates are given as ranges where the record disagrees: the destruction of the palace at Ano Englianos around 1200, with a minority case for around 1250; the conquest of Messenia between roughly 743 and 715 on the competing reckonings; the second war beginning around 685 on Pausanias's count and placed by others in the middle of the seventh century. The traditional helot-to-Spartiate ratio, and all population figures, are deliberately not given here; they rest on thin foundations and belong where they can be argued properly.

NO IMPIETY IN SLAYING THEM

Module 1 · The Floor of Force — the conquest that took the ground, and the permanent apparatus that had to be built afterwards because nothing else was holding it: a state of war formally renewed each year against the people who grew the food

What the conquest was, and what can honestly be said about it

The force that took Messenia cannot be reconstructed. No muster roll survives, no chronicle written within two centuries of the event, no depiction of the men who did it. What survives is a duration in verse — a war of twenty years, fought, Tyrtaeus says, by *the warrior fathers of our fathers* — and the fact of the outcome. Everything else in the narrative tradition comes through Pausanias in the second century AD, working from a Hellenistic epic and a Hellenistic prose account, and it should be read as a national legend rather than as evidence for how an eighth-century army was organised.

Two things can nonetheless be said with confidence, and both matter more than the tactical detail would.

The first is that this was not the classical Spartan army. The heavy infantry line that the Greek world later found so formidable — the interlocked shields, the drilled advance, the divisions and subdivisions that let a Spartan commander manoeuvre where others could only walk forward — belongs to the seventh century and after. Tyrtaeus, writing during the second war and therefore already two generations past the conquest, describes something recognisably on the way to it and not yet arrived: men told to plant both feet, bite their lips, cover thigh and shin and chest and shoulder with the belly of a broad shield and go in close rather than fight at a distance, but with light-armed men still present in the same battle, sheltering under those shields and throwing stones and javelins from behind them. An army that has to be *told* to stand and close is an army in which standing and closing is not yet second nature. Whatever took Messenia, it was not the machine that later held it.

The second is that the operation had a standard form, and Sparta ran the same form again a century or so later against Tegea and left a record of it. Herodotus says the Spartans, grown confident, asked Delphi for the conquest of Arcadia and received an answer promising them Tegea to dance in and a fair plain to measure out with a line; they marched *carrying fetters with them*, trusting the oracle and expecting to enslave the Tegeans, and were beaten, and the survivors were put to work tilling the Tegean plain

wearing the chains they had brought, measuring the ground with a line — the fetters still hanging in the temple of Athena Alea when Herodotus went to look at them. That baggage train is the clearest surviving statement of what a Spartan war of conquest was for. It carried the instruments of the intended settlement with it: manacles for the people, a measuring cord for the ground. Nothing about the enterprise was improvised or reluctant. It had a template, and at Tegea the template failed and the operators found themselves inside it.

The floor that had to be built afterwards

The framework's ordinary sequence runs from the founding violence to a belief laid over it, after which the force withdraws to the margins and the order becomes cheap. Sparta never reached the second stage in Messenia, and could not, for the reason the previous stage of this study established: what was conquered was a country of villages with no regional apparatus in it, the earlier state having burned four centuries before and left nothing to inherit. There was no elite to buy, no office to occupy, no priesthood to redirect, no revenue stream to capture. The surplus therefore had to be lifted household by household by individual Spartans, and the arrangement that produced it had to be held up, continuously and by force, by the same few thousand men.

This is the crucial distinction the case forces, and it is easy to lose because both things get called conquest. The violence that *takes* a territory is an event with a cost that can be paid once. The violence that *holds* a labour force in place on its own land is an overhead, incurred every year for as long as the arrangement lasts. Most successful conquests convert the first into something much cheaper than the second — a settlement with local notables, a belief the conquered come to hold, an administration that runs itself. Sparta could do none of that, and so it paid the overhead. Everything catalogued below is that overhead, itemised.

The Greek world knew Sparta chiefly for the opposite. Thucydides, setting out the balance of power at the war's opening, records that Sparta *"at a very early period obtained good laws, and enjoyed a freedom from tyrants which was unbroken,"* holding the same form of government for more than four hundred years and thereby put in a position to arrange the affairs of other states. That is the reputation: the most stable constitution in Greece, the city where no tyrant ever arose, the standard against which admiring Athenians measured their own disorder. Set beside it what the same admirers reported about the arrangement's foundations, and the gap is the subject of this module. It is not a gap between a public statement and a private one, because Sparta made no secret of the helots. It is a gap between the register in which the constitution

was discussed and the register in which its base was maintained — and it survived, in Greek thought and long afterwards, because almost nobody insisted on holding the two in view at once.

A war declared every year

The single most revealing institution in the case is a legal act. Plutarch, reporting what he found in Aristotle's now-lost account of the Spartan constitution, states it in one sentence: *"And Aristotle in particular says also that the ephors, as soon as they came into office, made formal declaration of war upon the Helots, in order that there might be no impiety in slaying them."*

Read what the instrument does. It does not create a power the Spartans lacked; they could kill helots, and did. What it creates is a *category*. A Greek who killed a man incurred pollution — a religious liability attaching to the killer, his household and potentially his city, requiring purification and exposing him to the anger of the dead man's kin and gods. A man killed in war did not generate that liability. The annual declaration therefore performs a conversion of exactly the kind this framework exists to name: it converts murder into an act of war, and it does so prospectively, covering everything the coming year may require. It is a legal fiction in the plainest sense, since no war was being fought, no enemy state existed, and the persons declared against were the same persons who would deliver the barley next month.

The question that matters is who the fiction was for, and the answer is not the helots. A helot facing a Spartan with a dagger was in no way better off for the constitutional propriety of his death, and no helot's compliance turned on whether the ephors had been to the assembly in the first month of their term. The fiction was for the gods, and through them for the Spartans themselves — for the young men who would do the killing and who had been raised to believe that unsanctioned killing stained them. It is a robe cut for the operators of the floor, so that the floor can be operated without cost to the operator's standing with the divine. That is the mechanism, and it will recur.

The sourcing has to be stated honestly, because this is precisely the material the tradition is worst on. The report reaches us at two removes: Aristotle, writing in the fourth century when Sparta was a functioning state he had good information about, transmitted by Plutarch five hundred years later. Plutarch himself is uneasy with it. He raises the whole subject only to defend his hero, doubts that the *krypteia* can have been Lycurgan at all, and offers his own dating: *"in my opinion, such cruelties were first practised by the Spartans in later times, particularly after the great earthquake,"* when the helots and Messenians rose together and brought the city into the greatest peril.

That is a claim with a motive — Plutarch wants Lycurgus clean — but it is not therefore wrong, and it is the sort of claim the framework should take seriously, since an order's apparatus of terror characteristically hardens after the moment it discovers it can lose. What can be said is that the declaration is attested for the classical period on the authority of a contemporary analyst, and that projecting it back to the eighth century is a guess.

The hunt for the sturdiest and best

The *krypteia* is attested in the same passage and, in outline, from earlier: Plato's Spartan speaker in the *Laws* lists it among the city's exercises in endurance, and Plutarch says it was Aristotle who called it a Lycurgan institution. Plutarch's description is the fullest that survives. The magistrates sent out into the countryside the most discreet of the young warriors, equipped with daggers and rations; by day they hid in obscure places, and at night they came down onto the roads and killed any helot they caught. And then the detail that changes what the institution is: *"Oftentimes, too, they actually traversed the fields where Helots were working and slew the sturdiest and best of them."*

That is not random terror. Terror aimed at the general population would kill indiscriminately, because its product is fear and any death produces it. Selecting the strongest men in a working field produces something else: it removes, one at a time and before they are needed, the individuals around whom a rising could organise. It is a standing cull of the subject population's potential leadership.

This deserves to be named plainly because of what it implies about Spartan understanding. An order that hunts the ablest of the people it rules has formed a view about where danger comes from, and its view is that danger comes from capable men rather than from mass misery. The corpus arrives at the same conclusion from the outside and by a different route — that structural change is driven by people with standing and means who have stopped benefiting, with the mass present as soldier, crowd and body count. Sparta did not need the analysis. It had reached the operative half of it, and built a permanent institution to act on it. When a framework's claim turns up as the explicit working assumption of an order that had every incentive to get it right, that is confirmation from an unexpected direction, and it is worth more than another case that merely fits.

The sentry who faces inward

The apparatus was not only nocturnal. Xenophon, who admired Sparta, fought for it and sent his own sons through its upbringing, describes the Spartan camp on campaign and lets slip its architecture without a flicker: sentries were posted by day along the place where the arms were kept, facing inward, *"for the object of these is to keep an eye not on the enemy but on their friends."* The enemy was watched by cavalry from high ground. The word *friends* is Xenophon's, and it is doing the work of not saying *helots*. He adds that patrols always carried their spears for the same reason that slaves were kept away from the arms.

At home the same arithmetic ran. Critias — Athenian oligarch, later one of the Thirty, a man who knew Sparta as an admirer — reported that mistrust led the Spartiate to disable shields when at home by removing the arm-grip, and that since this could not be done on campaign, where the shield might be wanted in a moment, he instead went about permanently carrying his spear, reckoning that a spear would master a helot who had only a shield; the Spartans had also, Critias says, devised bolts they believed would hold against a helot attack. Myron of Priene, a hostile third-century writer preserved by Athenaeus, adds the sumptuary layer: helots were required to wear a dogskin cap and a garment of skins, and to receive a fixed number of beatings every year regardless of any wrongdoing, so that they should never forget they were slaves. Myron's bias is real and his date is late; the detail of a beating administered on a schedule rather than for an offence is nonetheless internally consistent with everything else here, because a punishment untethered from conduct is not discipline but a status marker, and a status marker has to be reapplied because status is not a fact but a practice.

Assembled, these are the ordinary furniture of a household that expects to be attacked by its own workforce: the disabled shield, the spear carried indoors, the bolt on the door, the guard facing the wrong way. The framework's rule is that surveillance is the tell of a belief that never took, and it holds here as flatly as anywhere in the corpus. But Sparta sharpens it. What is being watched in Xenophon's camp is not a suspected individual; it is a category, permanently, with no expectation that the watching will ever end. This is not surveillance in search of a plot. It is surveillance as a permanent condition of the arrangement's existence, budgeted for like a rampart.

Two thousand men who crowned themselves

The clearest single act of the floor is recorded by Thucydides, in an aside, while he is explaining why Sparta was glad to send seven hundred helots to Thrace with Brasidas in

424. He notes that the Spartans feared what the Athenian base at Pylos might encourage the helots to do, and then generalises: *"fear of their numbers and obstinacy even persuaded the Lacedaemonians to the action which I shall now relate, their policy at all times having been governed by the necessity of taking precautions against them."*

Then the action:

> *The Helots were invited by a proclamation to pick out those of their number who claimed to have most distinguished themselves against the enemy, in order that they might receive their freedom; the object being to test them, as it was thought that the first to claim their freedom would be the most high spirited and the most apt to rebel. As many as two thousand were selected accordingly, who crowned themselves and went round the temples, rejoicing in their new freedom. The Spartans, however, soon afterwards did away with them, and no one ever knew how each of them perished.*

Every element repays attention. The instrument is a public offer of manumission for military merit, which is to say a promise that the order can be exited by service — the very promise on which most slave societies rely to make service worth performing. It was issued as a test, and the criterion selected for is *self-assessment*: the men who came forward were the men who believed they had earned freedom, and it was that belief, not any act, which condemned them. Two thousand identified themselves. They were crowned and taken round the temples, so that the identification was public and complete. Then they were removed, in a manner Thucydides — an exiled general with good Peloponnesian sources, writing within a generation — could not establish.

It is the same instrument as the *krypteia*, applied once and at scale: a filter that finds the ablest and most self-possessed members of the subject population and removes them. The refinement is that this version made the subjects do the selecting. And the phrase Thucydides chooses for the standing policy — that Spartan arrangements had always been governed by the necessity of precaution against the helots — is not rhetoric from a hostile source. It is the analytical judgement of the most careful observer the period produced, offered in passing as background his readers would accept without argument.

The reach the floor could not exceed

The overhead had a strategic price, and the Greeks could see it. Sparta's army was the finest instrument in Greece and could not be spent freely, because it was also the thing preventing the collapse of the arrangement that fed it. Thucydides notes the Spartans' reluctance to undertake foreign wars; Aristotle, analysing the constitution, put the

burden at the centre of his criticism, observing that the Thessalian *penestai* had often risen against their masters and *"the Helots in like manner against the Lacedaemonians, for whose misfortunes they are always lying in wait,"* and adding that the mere necessity of policing a serf class is an irksome business in itself. A hierarchy whose base is permanently waiting for the top to stumble cannot afford to stumble abroad.

The clearest picture of how the problem was managed comes from the largest army Sparta ever sent beyond the Isthmus. At Plataea in 479, Herodotus reports, the right wing held ten thousand Lacedaemonians, of whom five thousand were Spartiates and — attending those five thousand — thirty-five thousand light-armed helots, *seven appointed for each man*. The ratio has been used ever since as a demographic estimate and it will not bear that weight; it is one battlefield figure, not a census. What it will bear is a different reading, argued by Thomas Figueira and hard to resist: that a levy on this scale was not a military requirement at all. Five thousand hoplites do not need thirty-five thousand attendants. What they cannot afford is to leave thirty-five thousand able-bodied helots at home in Laconia with the army gone and a Persian raid possible. On that reading the largest Spartan expedition in history took its potential insurgents with it, under guard, because the alternative was worse — which is the overhead again, showing up in the order of march.

The same anxiety governed what Sparta let anyone know. Thucydides could not determine the number of Spartans present at Mantinea in 418, he says, because of the secrecy of their government, and had to reconstruct it from the visible frontage and the known depth of the files. A state that conceals its own strength from allies as well as enemies is protecting something, and what it was protecting is not obscure: an order held by a minority against a majority is safest when nobody, including the majority, can count.

What the floor was made of

It is worth being precise about the nature of the monopoly, because Sparta is an odd case and the oddity is instructive. The floor of force normally rests, in part, on a weapons monopoly: the conqueror keeps arms and the conquered are disarmed, so that even a determined rising begins from nothing. Sparta did not do this, and could not. Helots carried weapons at Plataea, seven to a Spartiate. Helots were armed as hoplites and sent to Thrace with Brasidas in 424. From the late fifth century onward, freed helots were fielded as regular heavy infantry under their own designation. The subject population was routinely put into the field with edged metal in its hands.

What Sparta monopolised was not arms but the capacity to act as a body. A hoplite is nearly useless alone; the shield covers the man to his left, and a line that has not

drilled together does not hold when it is pushed. The Spartan advantage lay in exactly the things a scattered rural population could not acquire — the habit of formation, the subdivision of the army into units with officers who could be given orders in the field, the years of common training that turned several thousand individuals into a single manoeuvrable object. Critias's spear-carrying Spartiate expects to face a helot with a shield and no line, and expects to win. The framework should record this plainly: **a floor can be built on a monopoly of coordination rather than a monopoly of weapons, and where it is, the order will invest its effort in formation rather than in disarmament.** It also explains something that would otherwise look like recklessness. Sparta could arm helots because arming them did not transfer the thing that mattered. What it could not do was let them assemble, train, or acquire leaders — which is precisely what the *krypteia* and the killing of the two thousand were designed to prevent.

The other half of the cost column is geography, and it is briefer. A helot who ran had the Taygetus wall at his back or the sea in front of him, the coastal towns in the hands of communities that answered to Sparta, and — decisively — a family and a plot he could not carry. Exit was not impossible; helots deserted to the Athenians at Pylos in 425, and the record of that will belong to the account of how the order ended. But for four centuries the ordinary answer to why a man did not simply leave was that leaving meant abandoning everyone he had, in a peninsula whose exits were held by the people he was leaving.

Reading the floor against the framework

The previous stage of this study established that Sparta conquered a country containing nothing it could rent — no office, no notables, no revenue apparatus — and therefore had to take the surplus in person and defend the taking in perpetuity. This module is what that sentence cost, itemised: a body of men who did no other work, a nocturnal killing service that culled the subject population's ablest, a camp whose sentries faced inward, a household architecture of disabled shields and bolted doors, an army that could not be spent freely abroad, a state that concealed its own numbers, and a public offer of freedom used as a trap to identify and destroy two thousand men who thought well enough of themselves to accept it. None of this is excess laid over the arrangement. It is the arrangement, seen from the side that had to be paid for.

Two things are offered to the framework, one new and one a strengthening.

The new one is about what a floor can be made of. This collection has generally found the floor resting on a weapons monopoly, and read the disarmament of the conquered as among the first acts of any durable conquest. Sparta held the largest

subject population in Greece for three centuries while routinely arming it, and the reason is that its monopoly was on **coordination** — on drill, on the subdivided command structure, on the habit of formation that turns individuals into a line — rather than on the possession of arms. The refinement to carry forward is that the floor's substance is whichever component of organised violence the subject population cannot reconstitute, and that this varies. Where it is arms, expect disarmament, registers of weapons, and punishment for possession. Where it is coordination, expect the opposite pattern: weapons tolerated, but assembly, training and the emergence of leaders attacked directly, because leaders are the missing component. The *krypteia*'s selection of the sturdiest and best in the fields, and the proclamation that invited two thousand men to identify themselves as exceptional and then removed them, are not two atrocities but one policy, and it is the policy the monopoly dictates.

The strengthening concerns a note left open earlier. The observation was that Sparta's legitimating story faced its own people from the earliest surviving line of Spartan verse, in a case with no metropole and no distance to hide anything behind — from which it seemed to follow that a robe turns inward not because distance permits it but because the conquered's belief is not needed. The annual declaration of war supplies the mechanism and lets the point be stated more firmly. That instrument bought nothing whatever from the helots, who neither knew nor cared about Spartan pollution law. It bought the ability of a young Spartiate to cut a farmer's throat in the dark and go home clean. **A floor of force generates its own legitimating fiction, addressed to the men who operate it, because the operators are formed people who cannot act indefinitely against what they were formed to believe.** Distance, where it exists, makes such a fiction easier to maintain; it is not what calls it into being. What calls it into being is that somebody has to do the killing and then eat dinner.

Held against the record, the Spartan floor is therefore not an exotic cruelty requiring a special explanation in the Spartan character. It is what an order looks like when it has conquered a labour force it cannot make believe in it, cannot hand over to intermediaries, and cannot afford to lose. The Greeks who admired the constitution and the moderns who inherited that admiration were not looking at a different Sparta. They were looking at the same one from the only angle from which the arrangement looks like a design rather than a bill.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Thucydides is quoted in Richard Crawley's translation (1874): 1.18 on Sparta's early good laws and unbroken freedom from tyrants, and 4.80.3–5 on the standing policy of precaution against the helots and the proclamation, crowning and disappearance of the two thousand; 5.68.2 on the secrecy of the Spartan government is cited rather than

quoted. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 28 is quoted in Bernadotte Perrin's translation (1914) for the ephors' formal declaration of war "in order that there might be no impiety in slaying them," attributed there explicitly to Aristotle's lost account of the Spartan constitution; for the *krypteia*'s method and its killing of the sturdiest and best; and for Plutarch's own opinion that such cruelties began after the earthquake of 464. Plutarch's doubt that the *krypteia* was Lycurgan is his own and is reported as such. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 12.2 and 12.4, on the sentries facing inward toward the arms and on the carrying of spears, is quoted in E. C. Marchant's translation (1925). Aristotle, *Politics* 2.9, on the *penestai* and the helots always lying in wait for their masters' misfortunes, is quoted in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885); the accompanying remark on the burden of policing a serf class is paraphrased from the same chapter. Herodotus is quoted in A. D. Godley's translation for the fetters carried to Tegea and the prisoners set to till the Tegean plain (1.66), and cited for the Plataea order of battle and the seven helots to each Spartiate (9.28–29). Critias's report on the disabled shields, the spear carried at all times and the bolted doors survives as fragment 88 B 37 Diels–Kranz, transmitted through Libanius, and is paraphrased here rather than quoted because the referent of one pronoun is ambiguous in the Greek. Myron of Priene on the dogskin cap and the annual beatings survives through Athenaeus and is paraphrased, with his hostility to Sparta flagged. Tyrtaeus is paraphrased from the Greek of fragment 11 West rather than quoted from a modern translation; the phrase rendered "you are the stock of unconquered Heracles" translates ἀλλ᾽ Ἡρακλῆος γὰρ ἀνικήτου γένος ἔστε. Modern scholarship is credited and paraphrased: Thomas Figueira on the Plataea helot levy as a security measure rather than a military one, and on the unreliability of the seven-to-one figure as demography; the general scholarly position on the seventh-century development of hoplite equipment and tactics, which remains contested in its details. Dates follow the conventional chronology where it is secure — Plataea 479, the earthquake and revolt from 464, the false manumission and Brasidas's expedition in 424, Mantinea 418 — and are given as approximations where, as with the *krypteia*'s origin, no secure date exists.

A BUSHEL OF BARLEY MEAL A MONTH

Module 2 · The Settlement — who got what, and on what terms it could be kept: a division of conquered land that was never equal and never inalienable, transmitted by ordinary inheritance, gift and dowry, with membership of the ruling caste priced at a monthly delivery of food

The settlement the Spartans came to describe

There is a famous account of how the conquered land was divided, and it should be set out in full before it is taken apart, because the taking apart is most of this module.

Plutarch reports that Lycurgus, finding an extreme inequality of property and a state overloaded with the destitute while its whole wealth had gathered in a few hands, persuaded the Spartans to give up their estates and accept a fresh division. He then *"distributed the rest of the Laconian land among the 'perioeci,' or free provincials, in thirty thousand lots, and that which belonged to the city of Sparta, in nine thousand lots, to as many genuine Spartans."* Each lot was calibrated: large enough to yield annually seventy bushels of barley for a man and twelve for his wife, with wine and oil in proportion, which Lycurgus judged sufficient for vigour and health of body and nothing else. Returning later from a journey at harvest time and seeing the heaps of grain standing parallel and equal across the plain, he is said to have smiled.

That is the settlement as the Greek world learned it, and as it has largely been inherited since: a single founding act, equal shares, a lot that cannot be sold, a caste of similars each holding an identical estate. It is a very good story. It is also, on the evidence, not what happened, and the process by which it came to be believed is itself one of the more instructive things in the case.

Why the description cannot be the settlement

Four things count against it, and they are of different kinds, which is what makes the case strong.

The first is internal. Plutarch cannot get the number right, because his sources could not: some said Lycurgus distributed nine thousand lots, others only six thousand with three thousand added later by King Polydorus, others that Polydorus added half of the

nine. A founding act remembered in three incompatible arithmetics is a tradition being reconstructed backwards, not a record being transmitted.

The second is chronological. The tradition's fullest form belongs to the third century, and its political context is not obscure. In the 240s Agis IV proposed to Sparta a genuine redistribution, and Plutarch preserves its terms: the land between the watercourse near Pellene and Taygetus and out to Malea and Sellasia to be cut into four thousand five hundred lots, the remainder into fifteen thousand, the first for Spartiates and the second for those of the surrounding country fit to serve as heavy infantry, with the citizen body to be replenished from perioikoi and from foreigners of free upbringing and military age. Set the two schemes side by side and the shape of the manufacture is visible: a reformer proposing 4,500 and 15,000 in his own generation, and a founder credited with 9,000 and 30,000 in the eighth century. The founding division is the reform's warrant, cast backwards. A programme that would otherwise be revolution becomes restoration.

The third is that the tradition needs a villain to explain the fall from the founding state, and the villain is thin. Plutarch's *Agis* supplies one: an ephor named Epitadeus, headstrong and violent, who quarrelled with his son and introduced a law permitting a man to give his estate and allotment to anyone he wished in his lifetime or by will, whereupon his fellow citizens *"welcomed the law out of greed, made it valid, and so destroyed the most excellent of institutions."* Epitadeus appears in no other ancient source whatever. Eckart Schütrumpf's analysis of the passage argues that the whole account is a construction in a Platonic register and historically useless, and the general run of modern scholarship treats the rhetra as at best undatable and quite possibly invented. A decline story that hangs on a single named man attested once, five centuries later, in a text written to justify a land reform, is not evidence about archaic tenure.

The fourth is decisive and it is contemporary. Aristotle wrote about Sparta while Sparta still functioned, from good information, and with no interest in flattering it. He describes a system of property that is the exact opposite of equal inalienable lots, and he describes it as ancient practice rather than recent corruption.

What the settlement actually was

Aristotle's account, in the ninth chapter of the second book of the *Politics*, is worth following closely because every clause is load-bearing.

He begins with the distribution: *"While some of the Spartan citizen have quite small properties, others have very large ones; hence the land has passed into the hands of a few."* He then names the mechanism, and the mechanism is a rule of transmission: *"although the legislator rightly holds up to shame the sale or purchase of an inheritance, he allows*

anybody who likes to give or bequeath it. Yet both practices lead to the same result." Sale was dishonourable; gift and legacy were not; and since a gift transfers the land as effectively as a sale, the prohibition prohibited nothing that mattered. Then the consequence that no reader of the equal-lots tradition expects: *"nearly two-fifths of the whole country are held by women; this is owing to the number of heiresses and to the large dowries which are customary."* And the disposal of heiresses is likewise private: a man may bestow his heiress on whomever he pleases, and if he dies intestate the right passes to his heir.

This is not a caste of identical smallholdings. It is ordinary Greek private property — heritable, divisible among children, carried by daughters in dowry, concentrated by marriage between rich houses and by legacy to friends — operating in a society where the object being concentrated was not a farm one worked but an income one drew from other people's labour. Stephen Hodkinson's reconstruction, which is now the standard account and which the ancient evidence supports at every point where it can be checked, is essentially this: Spartan land was privately owned and privately transmitted throughout, women held and inherited substantial amounts of it, and the concentration Aristotle describes is not a departure from the system but the system running.

The kings held more, and held it elsewhere. Xenophon records that the Spartan kings were assigned choice land in many of the perioikic communities, enough that they should not want for anything — an estate drawn from the towns of the free dependent population rather than from the helot-worked core, which quietly tells us that the settlement had a top storey the equal-lots story does not admit.

The two accounts of what the land yielded also fail to reconcile, and the failure is informative. Tyrtaeus, writing within living memory of the conquest, has the conquered bringing their masters *half of all the fruit the ploughland bears* — a proportion, which takes the whole of a bad year along with the good. Plutarch's Lycurgan lot yields a fixed seventy bushels and twelve, which is a quota, and a quota leaves the cultivator whatever he can raise above it. Pausanias, reporting the terms imposed after the first war, says explicitly that no fixed tribute was laid on the Messenians but that they brought half of everything. It is possible that practice changed over four centuries, or differed between Laconia and Messenia, or that the later authors described the Laconian arrangements of their own day. What cannot be done is to treat the fixed figure as the archaic reality, because the fixed figure arrives attached to the founding legend and shares its provenance.

What the instrument found, and what it converted

The framework requires that a settlement be read as a conversion, and that the prior form of the thing converted be put on the page. Here the honest first answer is that it cannot be. Nothing survives of how land was held in Messenia before the Spartans came; there were no documents, and the archaeology of village agriculture does not record tenure. Any account of the conversion of Messenian landholding would be invention.

But the conversion is plainly visible on a different axis, and it is the inverse of the one this collection has become used to finding. The characteristic modern instrument takes a *relation between persons* — land held as office, as lineage right, as collective patrimony — and converts it into a *thing* that can be granted, sold and taken by a court. Sparta did the opposite. It left the land as land and converted the *people* into an appurtenance of it. The helot household was fixed to a plot; the plot's holder took a share of what that household grew; and the household passed with the plot to the holder's heir. What was made transferable was not the field but the family on it.

The state then limited what an individual master could do with his share of that population. Ephorus reports that Spartiates were not free to sell helots beyond the frontiers or to free them at will, and later sources add a prohibition on demanding more than the customary render. These restrictions read at first like protections and they were experienced as such at the margins, but their function is not obscure and there is a close comparison. Van Wees, reading the Greek serf regimes against the Spanish encomienda, points out that a conquering community which has no external supply of labour must stop its own members from consuming the labour force through private greed — selling their share abroad for cash, working it to death, converting a permanent asset into a windfall. Every such rule is the collective defending the arrangement against the individuals who benefit from it. **Where a conquest lives on a labour force it cannot replace, expect the conquerors to legislate against themselves,** and read those laws as evidence about the scarcity of the labour rather than about the tenderness of the masters.

The fiction that arrived five hundred years late

This collection has found three families of legal fiction doing the work of settlement: declaring occupied land vacant, in order to dispossess; declaring granted land already owned, in order to bind an elite; declaring collective land partible, in order to manufacture sellers where none existed. Sparta ran none of them. There was no statute, no charter, no cadastral survey, no register of estates, no instrument of any kind

that survives or that any ancient writer reports as having existed. The largest transfer of agricultural land in archaic Greece was executed without a document.

The reason is the one this study keeps arriving at from different directions. All three fictions are devices for laundering a taking through categories that a *home audience* already accepts as legitimate — property, contract, prior title — and they are needed because somebody who is not present at the taking has to be reconciled to it. Sparta had no such audience. The men who took the land, the men who voted on what to do with it and the men whose good opinion mattered were the same few thousand people, standing in the same valley. Nothing had to be laundered, because there was nobody to launder it for. What Sparta possessed instead was the claim already in circulation before the conquest — that Zeus had given this country to the sons of Heracles, with whom the Spartans had come into the Peloponnese — which is not a fiction covering a transaction but a title issued in advance of all transactions, and therefore requires no paperwork at any of them.

And then the test, which the case supplies unprompted. If legal fictions are called into existence by an audience that must be persuaded, a fiction should appear at whatever moment such an audience appears. One duly did. By the third century a large number of Spartiates had lost their land and their standing, and the men proposing to give it back to them needed a warrant that was not simply *we are taking your estates*. The equal, inalienable, Lycurgan lot — nine thousand of them, laid out at the founding, ruined by one greedy ephor — is that warrant. It is a settlement fiction of a recognisable family: it declares that the grantees already owned what they are about to be given, and that the reform is a restoration. It arrived roughly five hundred years after the conquest, and it was addressed neither to the conquered nor to any metropole, but to Spartiates. The instrument follows the audience.

The marker of inside and outside

If land was not the boundary, what was? The answer is precise, and it is the most unusual feature of the Spartan settlement.

A Spartiate belonged to a mess — a company of about fifteen men who dined together every day — and he belonged to it by paying. Plutarch preserves the schedule: each member contributed monthly a bushel of barley meal, eight gallons of wine, five pounds of cheese, two and a half pounds of figs, and a small sum of money for such relish as meat or fish. Aristotle names the consequence of failing to pay, and names it as ancient custom rather than as a recent hardship: at Sparta *"every one is expected to contribute, and some of them are too poor to afford the expense"*; the common meals were meant to be a popular institution and are the reverse of one, *"for the very poor can*

scarcely take part in them; and, according to ancient custom, those who cannot contribute are not allowed to retain their rights of citizenship." Elsewhere he puts it more bluntly still, describing the contribution as a fixed charge per head, failure to pay which bars a man by law from taking part in the government.

Read that as a rule of membership rather than as a dining arrangement and its structure is remarkable. Most orders in this collection mark the boundary of the ruling group by something performed once or not at all: a bloodline, a manumission, a name entered in a book, a credential, a deed done in youth and thereafter held. Sparta marked it by a delivery of food, due every month, for life. Membership was not a status a man acquired; it was a status he re-purchased, and the purchase had a price he might one day be unable to meet. Men who fell out of it existed as a recognised category — the *hypomeiones*, the inferiors — and appear in the record as a body with grievances. The mechanism of their falling, and what it did to the order's numbers, belongs to the modules on elite coordination and collapse. What belongs here is the design: a settlement in which the land was private and concentrating while the qualification was fixed and recurrent, so that the two moved against each other in every generation.

The rest of the ledger, and the question that runs down it

The settlement had four columns and only one of them has been described.

The *perioikoi* kept their towns and their land and were left to govern themselves locally, on condition that they had no voice at all in the decisions of the state whose wars they fought. They did the crafts, the trade and the seafaring that Spartiates would not do; they made the weapons; they moved about outside the borders as Spartiates could not; some of them held helots. Strabo reports that Laconia had once been called a country of a hundred cities and that in his day some thirty towns remained outside Sparta. In this settlement they are the only party who received something recognisable as a bargain: real property and real local autonomy in exchange for the surrender of foreign policy.

The helots received the arrangement described above from underneath — a household attached to a plot, half the crop or a fixed measure of it removed, no capacity to leave, no property that a Spartiate was obliged to respect.

And the fourth column is the one the framework insists on: the question asked of every recipient down the chain, *if this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would this man be better or worse off?* The Spartiate's answer is unambiguous — he would lose his income, his leisure, his standing and his safety in a single motion. The helot's answer is equally unambiguous in the other direction. The interesting answer is the perioikos's, because it is genuinely balanced: he would keep his town and his fields and lose a

market, a defence umbrella and a settled place in a working order. The ancient record contains the answer he actually gave, twice, and it is not the one a Spartiate would have predicted. Perioikic communities joined the rising after the earthquake in the 460s, and perioikoi were prominent among the population of the free Messenian state founded after Leuctra. A settlement that buys the middle tier with autonomy rather than with a stake is buying something that does not hold when the price of defection falls, and that is the fault line the module on elite coordination will have to run down.

Reading the settlement against the framework

The account this study has been building holds together at this stage in a way worth stating once, plainly, before it is extended.

Sparta conquered a country with no apparatus in it to capture, and therefore had to take the surplus in person and defend the taking with a standing floor of force. This module adds the terms on which that was organised internally. The conquered land was distributed as ordinary private property among the conquerors, not as equal state allotments; it was transmitted by inheritance, gift, legacy and dowry, and it concentrated accordingly, until on Aristotle's account most of it lay in few hands and nearly two-fifths of the country was held by women. What was made uniform was not the estate but the *obligation*: a monthly contribution in kind, identical for every man, which alone conferred and preserved membership of the ruling caste. The famous Spartan equality was therefore never a settlement. It was a floor placed under consumption and a ceiling placed on display, laid across a distribution of wealth that was as unequal as any in Greece, and it was believed by outsiders because the visible surface — the same black broth, the same cloak, the same table — was designed to be all that was visible.

The contribution this module makes is about legal fictions, and it follows from the thing this case keeps supplying by subtraction. The three settlement fictions the corpus has documented are all instruments for making a taking acceptable to somebody who was not there when it was taken. Sparta had no such person: conqueror, beneficiary and audience were one body of men in one valley, and Sparta accordingly produced no settlement instrument at all — no charter, no survey, no register, nothing. **A legal fiction is a function of an audience that must be persuaded; where that audience does not exist, the fiction does not appear, and its absence is as diagnostic as its presence.** The case then supplies the confirming half without being asked. When, five centuries later, Sparta finally acquired an audience that had to be persuaded — its own dispossessed citizens, and the kings who proposed to restore them — a settlement fiction appeared immediately, in the fully developed *recognition* form: the equal

Lycurgan lot, which declares that the men about to receive land had always owned it and that the reform is a return. It is the same instrument as a colonial agreement confirming chiefs in estates they never held, aimed at a different audience for a different reason, and it arrived exactly when an audience did.

A second and smaller finding is carried forward for testing. The conversion this settlement performed runs opposite to the one the corpus has come to expect. The modern instrument turns a relation between persons into a transferable thing; Sparta turned persons into an appurtenance of a thing, fixing a household to a plot so that the household passed with the field. Where that is the conversion, expect the conquerors to legislate against their own freedom of action — bans on selling the labour abroad, on freeing it privately, on raising the render — not as mercy but as a collective defending a stock it has no means of replacing.

What must not be smuggled in here is the conclusion that the Spartiates were therefore cynics who knew their equality was a sham. Nothing suggests it. A man who ate the same supper as his neighbour every evening of his adult life, wore the same cloak, sent his sons through the same brutal upbringing and stood in the same line, and who was forbidden by custom to display what he owned, had every reason to experience the order as one of similars, whatever the deeds said. The equality was real as a practice and false as a description of the property beneath it, and both halves have to be held at once, because the first is what made the second bearable and the second is what eventually emptied the ranks.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 8.3–4 (the division into thirty thousand and nine thousand lots, the disagreement among his sources over nine thousand against six thousand plus Polydorus's three thousand, and the yield of seventy bushels for a man and twelve for his wife) and *Lycurgus* 12 (the monthly mess contribution of barley meal, wine, cheese, figs and a small sum for relish) are quoted in Bernadotte Perrin's translation (1914). Plutarch's *Agis* 5 on the rhetra of Epitadeus, and *Agis* 8 on the terms of Agis IV's own proposed redistribution into four thousand five hundred and fifteen thousand lots, are quoted from Perrin and from the older Dryden–Clough version respectively, both in the public domain. Aristotle, *Politics* 2.9, is quoted throughout in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885): on the unequal distribution and the passing of the land into few hands, on the shame attaching to sale but not to gift or bequest, on the two-fifths of the country held by women through heiresses and dowries, and on the exclusion from citizenship of those who cannot pay the mess contribution; the parallel statement of the mess charge as a fixed levy per head, from the following chapter, is paraphrased. Tyrtaeus on the half-share is quoted as in the preceding modules, through Pausanias

4.14.5 in W. H. S. Jones's translation (1918), with Pausanias 4.14.4 for the absence of a fixed tribute. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 15.3, on the land assigned to the kings in perioikic communities, is paraphrased. Strabo 8.4.11 on the hundred cities of Laconia is paraphrased. Ephorus on the prohibition against selling helots beyond the frontiers or freeing them is reported at second hand in the ancient tradition and is given as such. Modern scholarship is credited and paraphrased: Stephen Hodkinson's reconstruction of Spartan property as private, heritable and concentrating, which is the standard account and against which the Lycurgan tradition is here measured; Eckart Schütrumpf's argument that the rhetra of Epitadeus is a Platonising fiction and historically useless; Hans van Wees on restrictions imposed by conquering communities on their own members' power to sell or free serfs, and on the comparison with Spanish colonial practice. Where the ancient figures conflict — the number of lots, the render as proportion or quota — both versions are given rather than reconciled, and the provenance of each is stated. No attempt is made here to give the size of the Spartiate body or the helot population; the numbers are contested and belong where they can be argued.

LAW IS THE MASTER WHOM THEY OWN

Module 3 · The Robe — a legitimating story of extraordinary reach and prestige, addressed to the conquerors, to their allies, to the whole Greek world and to Delphi, and never once to the people whose labour the whole arrangement stood on

The congregation that was never preached to

Sparta produced one of the most successful legitimating stories in European history. It persuaded the Greeks who fought it, the philosophers who analysed it, the Romans who came after, and a great deal of the modern world; two and a half thousand years later the word *spartan* still carries it. That story has to be reconstructed carefully, and the first thing to establish about it is negative and easily missed: none of it was aimed downward.

There is no Spartan doctrine of helotage. No account survives, and none is reported by any ancient writer as having existed, in which the helots were told why their condition was right — no myth of an ancestral fault, no theology of servitude, no priesthood addressing them, no festival at which their subordination was explained to them as the order of the world. Aristotle, hunting for what was wrong with the Spartan constitution and cataloguing its treatment of the subject population in some detail, does not mention any such teaching, and his complaint is precisely that the Spartans *"have not found out the secret of managing their subject population."* Nothing was managed. They were held.

They were not, however, outside the religious world. Helots took part in the great festival at Amyclae; there was a sanctuary of Poseidon at Taenarum on the southern cape to which they could and did flee as suppliants. What happened there is the sharpest available measure of how much their belief was worth to Sparta. Thucydides records it in a single sentence, as one item in a diplomatic exchange: the Athenians demanded that the Lacedaemonians drive away the curse of Taenarus, referring to certain helots who had taken refuge in the temple of Poseidon there, whom the Spartans, having first raised them up by the hand, then led away and killed — and the Lacedaemonians themselves believed this act to have been the cause of the great earthquake that struck Sparta. (Pausanias, later, says the men dragged out were condemned Lacedaemonians rather than helots, so the identification is not beyond

dispute.) On Thucydides' version, the Spartans committed a sacrilege they themselves subsequently believed had brought down their city, rather than let a group of helots reach sanctuary. That is a considerable price, knowingly paid. What it was paid for was not belief. It was reach.

The god who countersigned

The legitimating apparatus that does exist is unusually well documented, and its first feature is that every important element of it carries a divine signature obtained at Delphi.

Herodotus gives the founding account, and gives it as something the Spartans of his own day told about themselves. Before the change, he says, the Lacedaemonians *"were the worst governed of well nigh all the Greeks, having little intercourse among themselves or with strangers."* Then Lycurgus went to Delphi, and as he entered the hall the priestess addressed him in hexameters: *"Dear to Zeus thou hast come to my well-stored temple, Lycurgus, / Dear to Zeus and to all who dwell in the courts of Olympus"* — and went on to say that she was in doubt whether to pronounce him man or god, but inclined to god. Some say, Herodotus adds, that the Pythia also declared to him the constitution that now exists at Sparta; the Lacedaemonians themselves say that Lycurgus brought it from Crete. When he died they built him a shrine and greatly revere him.

Read structurally, that is a complete legitimating package in six lines. It supplies a before-state (disorder, the worst-governed of the Greeks), a single agent, an external and unimpeachable authorising voice, an ambiguity as to whether the agent was human at all, and a cult. It also does something more specific and more useful: it locates the authority for the arrangement *outside Sparta*. A constitution that a Spartan king or a Spartan faction had devised would be a thing other Spartans could argue with. A constitution handed over at Delphi is not.

The apex here already held uncontested force at home. It did not need Apollo's endorsement to make anyone in Laconia obey. That it went to Delphi anyway, repeatedly and at real cost, is therefore evidence in itself: somebody's recognition was required, and it was not the helots', who neither consulted the oracle nor would have been consoled by it. The audiences that mattered were the Spartiates themselves, whose obedience had to be to something other than each other, and the wider Greek world, in whose currency a Delphic sanction was the highest denomination available.

The document, and the clause that took it back

The nearest thing Sparta had to a constitutional text is preserved by Plutarch, who says the Spartans called it a *rhetra* and that Lycurgus obtained it as an oracle from Delphi. Its operative words are these:

> *When thou hast built a temple to Zeus Syllanius and Athena Syllania, divided the people into 'phylai' and into 'obai,' and established a senate of thirty members, including the 'archagetai,' then from time to time 'appellazein' between Babyca and Cnacion, and there introduce and rescind measures; but the people must have the deciding voice and the power.*

The last clause is the striking one and it should be given its full weight: the assembly of Spartiates is declared sovereign, by the god, in the founding instrument. Every element around it is a structure — a temple, tribal divisions, a council of thirty including the kings, a place of meeting between two named streams — and the structure terminates in the statement that the decision belongs to the people.

Then Plutarch reports the amendment. When the people took to altering the motions put before them by addition and subtraction, Kings Polydorus and Theopompus *"inserted this clause into the rhetra: 'But if the people should adopt a distorted motion, the senators and kings shall have power of adjournment'"* — that is, they might refuse to ratify and dissolve the session outright. And then the sentence that is the whole module in miniature: *"they were actually able to persuade the city that the god authorized this addition to the rhetra."*

The rider does not qualify the sovereignty clause; it cancels it, in the only circumstance where sovereignty means anything. A people whose decisions stand except when the elders dislike them has a veto over nothing. And the instrument that performed the cancellation was not a decree, a compromise or an admitted change of mind, but a claim that the same divine source which had granted the power had now granted its removal. Tyrtaeus, writing close to the events, records the same doctrine in verse and in a specific order: the mandate came from Pytho, and it gives council and honours to the kings, second place to the elders, and third to the men of the people, who confirm what is put to them without perverting it. The verse ranks what the prose text left flat.

That is the seam, worked in public, in the earliest Spartan constitutional material that survives. A sacred rule is rigid for whoever hears it plainly and supple for whoever controls what it is taken to mean, and the men who controlled the reframing here were the two kings and twenty-eight elders whose power the rider restored.

Eunomia, and who was demanding what

The Greek name for the whole arrangement is *eunomia* — good order, or the condition of having good laws — and it is worth establishing what problem it was invented to answer, because the answer is not the one the word's later reputation suggests.

Tyrtaeus wrote a poem called *Eunomia*. Aristotle, discussing the causes of faction in aristocratic states, tells us what occasioned it: faction arises when some citizens have too little and others more than enough, *"which happens particularly often in war,"* and he gives as his example Sparta at the time of the Messenian war, citing Tyrtaeus's *Eunomia* — for, he says, certain citizens ruined by the war were demanding a redistribution of the land.

So the earliest identifiable Spartan legitimating doctrine was composed in response to a demand for land redistribution made by Spartiates, during the conquest, against other Spartiates. Not the helots; not the perioikoi. The distributive conflict that called forth the doctrine of good order was internal to the conquering caste, and the doctrine's function was to settle who ranked where among armed men who had just taken a country together and disagreed about the division. Everything else — the divine sanction, the ranking of kings and elders and commons, the sovereignty clause and its rider — belongs to that argument.

This makes sense of a feature of the Spartan robe that would otherwise be puzzling. It is almost entirely a *constitutional* doctrine: it concerns the relations of Spartiates to one another and to their kings, and it is silent on the relation between Spartiates and the people who fed them. That silence is not an oversight. The doctrine addressed the conflict that needed settling. The other relation was settled by other means.

Similars

Which brings the module to the word the Spartiates used for themselves: *homoioi*. It is regularly translated "equals," and this collection should not translate it that way. The root is *homoios*, like or similar; the word claims resemblance, not parity of holdings. The distinction matters because the previous stage of this study established, on Aristotle's contemporary testimony, that Spartan property was private, heritable and concentrating, that most of the land lay in few hands and nearly two-fifths of the country was held by women. The men who called themselves similars were not equals in any material sense, and there is no reason to think they believed they were.

What they were was *alike*, and alikeness was manufactured at considerable expense. Every Spartiate ate the same supper in the same company every evening of his adult life,

on the same fixed contribution. Every Spartiate wore the same cloak. Every Spartiate had gone through the same upbringing at the same ages. Every Spartiate stood in the same line under the same drill. Display of wealth was closed off; the rich man's advantage could be enjoyed but not shown. The revealed-preference test applies cleanly here and returns a clean answer: a landed elite that voluntarily forgoes the display of wealth it actually possesses is paying a real and avoidable price, and it is buying something. What it was buying is not obscure. Several thousand armed men who see no daily evidence that some of them are much richer than others are considerably less likely to divide into factions. The similarity was a coordination device among the dangerous, and it worked for centuries, which is a large part of why no tyrant ever arose at Sparta.

The word's most instructive appearance in the record is a negative one. Xenophon, introducing the conspirator Cinadon, describes him as a young man fine in body and brave in spirit — and not one of the *homoioi*. The category is documented at the moment somebody is found outside it. A membership defined by resemblance can be lost by ceasing to resemble, and the men who had ceased were counted and had a name.

The robe the Greeks wore for Sparta

The largest and most successful audience was outside Laconia altogether, and here the doctrine is not constitutional but moral, and it is stated by outsiders more often than by Spartans.

Thucydides, establishing the balance of power at the war's opening, records that the tyrannies of Hellas were put down by Lacedaemon, that Sparta obtained good laws very early and enjoyed unbroken freedom from tyrants, and had held the same form of government for more than four hundred years, *"and has thus been in a position to arrange the affairs of the other states."* When the war began, he says, *"the feeling of mankind was strongly on the side of the Lacedaemonians; for they professed to be the liberators of Hellas."* Brasidas, sent north in 424, told the people of Acanthus that he had come not to hurt but to set the Greeks free, and that the Spartan authorities were bound to him by great oaths — and the cities believed him enough to revolt.

And the doctrine's most quoted statement was put by Herodotus into the mouth of an exiled Spartan king, speaking to the Great King of Persia, which is to say addressed through a Greek historian to Greeks, about Spartans, in the presence of a barbarian:

> *For though they be free-men, they are not in all respects free; Law is the master whom they own; and this master they fear more than thy subjects fear thee. Whatever he commands they do; and his commandment is always the same: it*

forbids them to flee in battle, whatever the number of their foes, and requires them to stand firm, and either to conquer or die.

That is the robe in its finished form, and it is a very fine one. It solves, in a sentence, the problem every Greek city faced in explaining why free men should obey: they obey not a man but a rule, so that obedience is not servitude. It converts discipline into liberty and makes Sparta the answer to the question the whole Greek world was asking about itself.

Set beside it the arrangement the same city was running at home in the same decades. The magistrates entered office each year by declaring war on the agricultural population so that killing them would carry no pollution. Young men were sent into the countryside with daggers to kill helots by night, and to cross the fields and kill the strongest of the men working in them. Two thousand helots who came forward when freedom was publicly offered for distinguished service were crowned, taken round the temples, and made to disappear.

The arithmetic is left where it belongs. But two things should be said about it plainly, because the temptation to say only one of them is strong.

The first is that the liberation claim was not simply a lie, and treating it as one would misread how such claims work. Sparta really did put down tyrannies. Sparta really did fight at Thermopylae and command at Plataea. Brasidas really did free cities, and the cities he freed knew the difference. A legitimating story that never constrained anybody's conduct could not have been believed by the hard-headed men who acted on it; law cannot legitimate unless it genuinely binds, and the record shows Spartan conduct genuinely bound by it a great deal of the time, sometimes to Sparta's own cost.

The second is that no contradiction was felt, and that this is the fact requiring explanation rather than the hypocrisy. Nothing in the Greek record suggests that thoughtful Greeks who admired Spartan good order found themselves troubled by the helots. Aristotle criticised helotage at length, but as a *technical defect* — an arrangement that generated rebellions and made leisure insecure — not as a refutation of Spartan *eunomia*. The claim to be the liberator of the Hellenes and the fact of holding the largest servile population in Greece occupied different compartments, and nobody with standing was demanding that they be reconciled. Which is the same finding this study has now reached from four directions: legitimating claims are addressed to whoever must be satisfied, and no one was obliged to speak for the helots.

Tested, or revealed?

One diagnostic remains, and Sparta's answer is unusually clear.

A tested doctrine is revised when the evidence defeats it. A revealed doctrine reads failure as insufficient fidelity. The Spartan constitution was held to be ancestral, divinely authorised, and — Thucydides again — unchanged for more than four hundred years. The consequence is visible in the whole later literature of Spartan decline, which is with remarkable consistency a literature of *falling away*. When the citizen body shrank until the city could not survive one defeat, the explanation offered was not that the arrangement had a flaw but that the Spartans had ceased to keep it: gold and silver had come in, a greedy ephor had loosened the law on inheritance, the ancient discipline had been let go. The remedy proposed was always restoration. Even Aristotle, who was analysing rather than lamenting and who located the defect correctly in the laws of property, wrote within a frame in which there had been a legislator whose intentions had been frustrated.

That is the signature of a revealed doctrine, and it had a practical consequence this study will have to follow. An order that cannot conceive of its arrangement as defective cannot redesign it. It can only try to go back — which is exactly what Sparta eventually did, four hundred years too late and with the labour base already gone.

Reading the robe against the framework

This collection expects, in colonial cases, a *reversed robe*: a legitimating story cut not for the conquered, whose belief the floor does not need, but for the metropole and the army whose belief funds and mans the conquest. The reversal has been read as a colonial phenomenon, produced by distance — by the fact that the people who paid for the conquest and the people who suffered it were separated by a sea, so that two different accounts could be maintained without meeting.

Sparta refutes the distance explanation, and the refutation is now supported from four independent directions within this single case. The founding title claim — that Zeus gave this country to the sons of Heracles — is addressed to Spartans in the earliest Spartan verse that survives. The annual declaration of war on the helots bought nothing from the helots and everything from the young men who had to kill them. The settlement produced no legitimating instrument at all until, five centuries later, an audience appeared that had to be persuaded, whereupon one appeared immediately. And the whole doctrinal apparatus reconstructed here — the Delphic sanction, the rhetra and its rider, *eunomia*, the similars, the liberation of the Hellenes — is addressed upward to the gods, inward to the Spartiates, and outward to the Greeks, and never once downward. There is no metropole in this case. There is no sea. The conquerors and their home audience were the same men standing in the same valley, four miles from the fields they took. The robe faced away from the ruled anyway.

The revision the case demands is therefore to promote the reversed robe out of the colonial section and into the general statement: a legitimating story is addressed to whoever must be satisfied for the order to run, and the ruled are included in that audience only when their compliance is needed cheaply. Where force is sufficient and affordable, no doctrine is built for them, because none is required. Distance does not cause the reversal; it only makes the two audiences easier to keep apart, and thereby makes the reversal easier for a modern reader to see. The colonial cases are the clearest specimens of a general rule, not a special class.

A second observation follows from the same evidence and is offered more tentatively. Sparta held, simultaneously and without visible strain, the highest-prestige legitimating position in its cultural world and the harshest floor in it. The two did not interfere with each other, and the reason is not that the second was hidden — the helots were common knowledge, discussed by Herodotus, Thucydides, Critias, Xenophon and Aristotle without any sense of exposing a secret. The reason is that no audience whose opinion had consequences was asking for the two to be squared. **An order's most damaging inconsistency is not the one it conceals but the one nobody with standing has an interest in raising**, and the machinery that keeps such questions from acquiring an interested party is what the next stages of this study have to reconstruct.

Finally, the discipline this framework insists on applies here with particular force, because the Spartan robe is easy to sneer at from a distance of two and a half millennia. The men who believed that law was their master were not performing. They died at Thermopylae in a formation their poetry had told them to hold, and the epitaph left for them said only that they lay there in obedience to their orders. A thing that was built and then became real is not a lie, and a Spartiate formed from the age of seven in the conviction that his city's order was given by Apollo held a belief that was, for him, simply the shape of the world. That the same conviction was compatible with cutting a farmer's throat in a dark field is not evidence that it was insincere. It is evidence of what a doctrine does when it is built for one audience and the other has been placed outside the reach of the moral vocabulary altogether — which is the most ordinary and the most dangerous thing that formation can accomplish, and it is the subject of the next module.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Herodotus 1.65 on the Spartans as the worst governed of the Greeks, on Lycurgus at Delphi and the Pythia's hexameters, and Herodotus 7.104 on law as the master whom the Spartans own, are quoted in George Rawlinson's translation; Herodotus 7.228, the epitaph for the dead at Thermopylae, is paraphrased rather than quoted. Thucydides is

quoted in Richard Crawley's translation (1874) for 1.18 on Sparta's early good laws, unbroken freedom from tyrants and four hundred years of unchanged government, and in Benjamin Jowett's (1881) for 2.8.4 on the feeling of mankind favouring the Lacedaemonians because they professed to be the liberators of Hellas; 1.128 on the curse of Taenarus — the helot suppliants raised from the temple of Poseidon, led away and killed, and the Spartans' own belief that the great earthquake was the consequence — is paraphrased closely from the nineteenth-century English versions, with Pausanias's divergent account (that those dragged out were condemned Lacedaemonians) noted. Brasidas at Acanthus, Thucydides 4.85–86, is paraphrased. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 6 is quoted in Bernadotte Perrin's translation (1914) for the text of the Great Rhetra, for the rider inserted by Polydorus and Theopompus, and for Plutarch's remark that they persuaded the city the god had authorised the addition; Tyrtaeus's verse rendering of the same oracle, fragment 4 West, is paraphrased rather than quoted, since the surviving English versions of it are modern. Aristotle is quoted in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885): *Politics* 2.9 on the Spartans not having found out the secret of managing their subject population, and *Politics* 5 on faction arising from unequal property, with Sparta at the time of the Messenian war as the example and Tyrtaeus's *Eunomia* as the evidence that citizens ruined by the war demanded a redistribution of land. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 3.3.5, on Cinadon as a man fine in body and brave in spirit but not one of the *homoioi*, is paraphrased. The material on the *krypteia*, the ephors' annual declaration and the killing of the two thousand helots is as sourced in the preceding module, from Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 28 and Thucydides 4.80. On the word *homoioi*, the rendering "similars" rather than "equals" follows the ordinary sense of the Greek and the now-standard scholarly caution against the traditional translation; the substantive point about Spartan property inequality rests on Aristotle and on Stephen Hodkinson's reconstruction, credited in the preceding module. E. P. Thompson's finding that law cannot legitimate unless it genuinely constrains, invoked here against reading the liberation claim as simple fraud, is paraphrased and credited. Where the ancient accounts of the Rhetra's meaning diverge — and they diverge considerably, the text being corrupt in places and its interpretation contested throughout modern scholarship — the translation given is Perrin's and the disagreement is noted rather than resolved.

THEIR MASTERS DID NOT ALLOW IT

Module 4 · Formation — the most complete apparatus for making people that any Greek city built, aimed without exception at the ruling caste; and, pointed at the majority, a different instrument altogether, which installed no belief and had to be reapplied for ever

A boy handed to the state at seven

Every Greek city formed its citizens; only one took the process out of the household. Xenophon, who admired Sparta, fought for it and sent his own sons through its upbringing, sets the difference out as the first thing worth saying: elsewhere a father hires a slave to attend his boy and sends him to a schoolmaster, whereas at Sparta the control of the boys was given to a man drawn from the class that supplies the highest offices, the Warden, with power to gather them, take charge of them and punish them severely — and with *"a staff of youths provided with whips to chastise them when necessary; and the result is that modesty and obedience are inseparable companions at Sparta."*

The details that follow are consistent in purpose. Shoes were forbidden, so that feet would harden and the boy would climb, leap and run better than one in sandals. Clothing was reduced to a single garment for the whole year, so that he would be prepared for heat and cold alike. Food was kept deliberately short, and the shortfall was turned into a curriculum: the boys were expected to make it up by stealing, which was intended to make them resourceful in getting supplies and better fighting men — and those caught were beaten, not for stealing but for stealing badly, since *"in all cases men punish a learner for not carrying out properly whatever he is taught to do."* At the altar of Artemis Orthia the same lesson was staged as a contest: a boy was to snatch as many cheeses as he could while others scourged him, so that he might learn that a short endurance of pain buys lasting standing.

Then the provision that matters most, and which is easy to read past. So that the boys should never lack a ruler even when the Warden was absent, Xenophon says, authority was given to *any citizen who happened to be present* to require of them whatever he thought right and to punish them for misconduct. A Spartan child was therefore not under his father; he was under the caste. Every adult male was a magistrate over every boy, at all times, without appointment. That single rule converts

formation from something a state does to its young into something the whole adult population does continuously to itself, and it is the mechanism by which the Spartan order became self-enforcing at a cost the treasury never had to meet.

The formation did not stop at adulthood. A grown Spartiate dined every evening of his life with the same company of about fifteen men, on a contribution he had to supply, in a room where his conduct was known and discussed; he wore the same cloak as they did; he could not display what he owned. Xenophon puts the effect exactly: where the law requires equal contributions and a common way of living, wealth is not much worth pursuing, since men are adorned not by costly dress but by fitness of body. It is a formation that never releases its subject. Most orders in this collection catch a person young and then let the belief carry him; Sparta caught him at seven and kept a hand on him until he died.

The year that rehearsed the order

Formation also ran through the calendar, and here the surviving evidence is thinner than one would wish but its structure is legible.

Plutarch preserves what may be the single most economical formation artefact in Greek literature: at the festivals there were three choruses, corresponding to three ages. The old men sang first — *"We once did deeds of prowess and were strong young men."* The young men answered — *"We are so now, and if you wish, behold and see."* And the boys closed — *"We shall be sometime mightier men by far than both."* Three lines, sung annually, in which the whole society's ranking by age is stated, the claim of each rank is made in its own voice, and the boys are given the last word and told what they will become. The same tripartite arrangement is described at the Gymnopaediae, where the three choruses danced naked, the youths in front, the old men on the right and the men on the left, singing the songs of Thaletas and Alcman.

Poetry was not decoration in this order; it was the syllabus. Plutarch says the king sacrificed to the Muses just before battle, reminding his men of their training and of the decisions they had already made. And the Athenian orator Lycurgus reports a Spartan law that when the army took the field under arms, all should be summoned to the king's tent to hear the poems of Tyrtaeus, on the view that this above all would make them willing to die for their country. Whether or not the law was as old as claimed, the shape of the practice is clear: the same verses that told a man to plant both feet, bite his lip and cover thigh and shin with the belly of his shield were recited to him, by the state, at the moment before he had to do it.

The portrait of the good subject that all this installed can be stated plainly. He obeyed not a man but a rule, so that his obedience did not shame him. He held shame

itself as the governing sanction — the man who ran from a battle was called a trembler, a name that carried no legal penalty and no formal disability but ended his social life. He measured his worth by his place in the line, not by his estate. He deferred to age, because he had sung that he would one day be deferred to. And he understood himself as one of a body of similars, which was true of his cloak and his supper and not of his land, and which nothing in his upbringing gave him any reason to examine.

Two cautions belong here rather than in a footnote. The first is that this description rests largely on Xenophon, writing in the fourth century about a system he loved, and on Plutarch, writing five hundred years later. Nigel Kennell's work has shown that the institution known as the *agoge* — the word itself is not classical in this sense — was substantially reconstructed in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, when Sparta became a destination for visitors who wished to see the ancient discipline, and that a good deal of what the tourist literature describes belongs to that revival rather than to the archaic city. What can be said is that a rigorous, state-run, age-graded upbringing existed in the classical period and is attested by a contemporary who watched it. The particulars should be held with the dates attached. The second caution is that Spartan girls were also trained, in running and in feats of strength, on the reasoning that strong parents produce vigorous children — an arrangement no other Greek city made, and one which scandalised Aristotle for other reasons.

The formation that was never built

Now the other half of the module, which the framework requires and which most accounts of Sparta omit entirely.

Nothing described above touched the majority of the population. There was no *agoge* for helots, no upbringing, no curriculum, no age-grades, no chorus in which a helot boy sang what he would become. That is unremarkable in itself; no ancient order educated its serfs. What is remarkable, and what the previous module established, is that there was also no *doctrine*: no teaching that explained to the helots why their condition was right, no myth of ancestral fault, no theology of service, no festival at which their place was presented to them as the order of the world. The framework predicts this and gives the reason: forming the majority would mean admitting them, since a story that justifies a man's subordination has to address him as somebody capable of being persuaded, and a population addressed that way acquires a claim. Sparta withheld the formation and kept the claim closed.

But it did not leave the space empty, and what it put there is the finding of this module.

What was pointed downward instead

Four practices are attested, from four independent sources of varying reliability, and they have a common structure.

The first is compulsory mourning. Tyrtaeus, writing within living memory of the conquest, describes the conquered *wailing for their masters, they and their wives alike, whenever the baneful doom of death came upon any*. Pausanias, reporting the terms imposed after the first Messenian war, says it was ordained that men should come from Messene with their wives, in black garments, to the funerals of the kings and other magistrates, with a penalty on those who failed. Herodotus describes the royal funeral from the other end: horsemen carry the news through Laconia, women go about beating on cauldrons, a fixed number of the subject neighbours must attend from every part of the country, and these and the helots and the Spartans themselves assemble in thousands, men and women together, striking their foreheads and lamenting without stint and saying always that the last king was the best of all their kings.

The second is dress. Myron of Priene reports that each helot was required to wear a dogskin cap and to wrap himself in skins.

The third is the scheduled beating. The same source says they received a stipulated number of beatings every year regardless of any wrongdoing, so that they should never forget they were slaves.

The fourth is the staged performance. Plutarch records that helots were forced to drink strong wine undiluted and then brought into the public messes, so that the young men might see what a thing drunkenness was; and that they were ordered to sing songs and dance dances that were low and ridiculous, and to let the nobler kind alone.

Myron was hostile to Sparta and wrote in the third century; Plutarch is later still and was defending Lycurgus by dating such cruelties after the earthquake of 464. Both should be discounted accordingly. But Tyrtaeus is archaic and Spartan, and Herodotus is fifth-century and describes the royal funeral as something he has been told about a functioning custom, and between them they establish that compelled public grief was real. And the four practices, whatever the reliability of each, describe one thing.

Formation and degradation are not the same instrument

Consider what these practices actually do, against what the *agoge* does.

The upbringing of a Spartiate boy installs something that persists in his absence. It gives him an account of the world in which his obedience is honourable, a set of virtues he wants for himself, a rank he will rise into, and a company of men whose good opinion he will spend his life earning. It fills his benefit column early and permanently.

Once installed, it needs no enforcement, because he enforces it — on himself, and on every boy he passes in the street. That is an investment, and it compounds: the grandchildren take for granted what the great-grandparents had to be persuaded of, and the order gets cheaper each generation.

Nothing pointed at the helots does any of this. A cap and a skin garment mark a man; they do not persuade him of anything. A quota of blows administered annually *regardless of any wrongdoing* is not discipline at all — discipline responds to conduct, and this does not — but a status marker being reapplied on a schedule, exactly as a boundary fence is repainted. Being made drunk and displayed to other men's sons teaches those sons something and teaches the drunk man nothing he did not already know. And compelled lamentation is the purest case: a man made to weep in public for a master's death is not being taught that the master deserved his grief. He is being made to *perform* a grief everyone present, including him, knows he does not feel.

These are two different instruments with opposite economics, and the corpus should hold them apart. Formation is an investment that compounds and makes an order cheaper every generation. Degradation is a running cost that never compounds and must be paid again next year, because what it produces evaporates the moment it stops being applied. The scheduled annual beating is the proof on the face of the record: an order that has to hit a man on a timetable to remind him of his status has an arrangement that will not hold his status without being hit. Where this collection has previously noted that a conqueror who withholds formation from the majority keeps his order expensive and brittle, Sparta shows that the substitution is worse than a gap. The substitute is a permanent expenditure with no return, and it is one reason the Spartan cost column never fell.

The episode that tests it

The framework asks, of any base population, what they actually *did* the last time the order's authority was removed or tested, on the ground that a population merely performing compliance behaves differently from one for whom the belief is real. Sparta supplies an episode, and its answer is stranger than either alternative.

Plutarch records that when the Thebans invaded Laconia — the invasion of 369, in the aftermath of Leuctra — they ordered the helots they captured to sing the songs of Terpander, Alcman and Spendon the Spartan. *"But they declined to do so, on the plea that their masters did not allow it."*

The Spartan army had just been destroyed. The helots in question were in the hands of an invading force that had come to liberate them, being invited by their liberators to

sing the poetry of the men who had held them. And they refused, on the ground that it was not permitted.

The anecdote reaches us late and it reaches us with a moral already attached — Plutarch cites it to support the saying that in Sparta the free man is freer than anywhere in the world and the slave more a slave. It should not be pressed as though it were a survey. But taken for what it is, it says something precise, and it is not what a first reading suggests. It does not show helots loyal to Sparta. Within a year or two of that scene, Messenia was free, a city was founded under Ithome, and the arrangement was over for ever; the same population that would not sing took the liberty when it came. What the episode shows is that centuries of degradation had installed something after all — but what was installed was the *boundary*, not the belief. Those men had learned, thoroughly enough that it held when the power behind it had collapsed, that Spartan songs were not theirs to sing. They had not learned that Spartan rule was right.

That distinction is worth keeping, because it is the difference between the two instruments seen from the subject's side. Formation installs an account of the world that a man will act on when nobody is watching, including in his ruler's favour. Degradation installs a line he will not cross, and nothing else — no loyalty, no consent, no reason to defend anything. Rehearse a status for four hundred years and you will get people who know exactly where the status runs. You will not get people who think it just, and you will find that out on the day somebody offers them an alternative.

Where formation was thin, and what held instead

One further asymmetry deserves recording. The *perioikoi* were not formed either. They did not pass through the Spartan upbringing, did not eat in the messes, sang in no Spartan chorus and held no Spartan office, yet they fought in the line, made the weapons, sailed the ships and did nearly all the work the Spartiates would not do. Their compliance rested on a bargain — their own towns, their own land, their own local government — and not on any belief the Spartans had installed in them.

The framework's expectation is that a group bound by a bargain rather than by formation will hold precisely as long as the bargain looks better than the alternative, and no longer. The record obliges. Perioikic communities joined the rising after the earthquake of the 460s, and perioikoi were prominent in the population of the free Messenian state after Leuctra. An order that forms its own caste completely, degrades its labour force continuously and buys its middle tier with autonomy has three groups held by three different mechanisms, of which only the first produces anything like conviction. That is the structure the module on elite coordination will have to audit link by link, and the weak links are already visible.

Reading formation against the framework

The Spartan formation apparatus is the most thorough in the collection so far and it produced exactly what it was built to produce. For something like three centuries several thousand armed men with no work to do, living in a country whose subject population outnumbered them heavily, did not divide into factions, did not produce a tyrant, and went where they were sent. That is not a small achievement and it was not achieved by force; no coercive apparatus can make men behave that way toward one another. It was achieved by taking every boy at seven, placing him under the authority of every adult in the caste, filling his benefit column with standing and company and a future rank, and then never letting go of him. The corpus should credit it at full weight, because the coordination problem it solved destroyed most of Sparta's contemporaries.

The contribution this module makes is the distinction the case forces, and it follows directly from what the study has already established. An order that does not need the belief of its subject population will not build one for them — this much was clear from the doctrine. What Sparta adds is that the space is not simply left empty. Something is put there, and it is a different kind of thing: **not formation, which installs an account of the world and thereafter runs itself, but degradation, which installs a boundary and must be reapplied on a schedule for ever.** The two are easy to confuse because both are things done to subject populations by rulers, and both look like culture from outside. Their economics are opposite. One is capital and the other is maintenance. An order that has substituted the second for the first has committed itself to a permanent charge that buys no compliance beyond the moment of application, and it will discover this the first time an alternative appears within reach — which is what the helots' liberators found waiting for them in 369, when the men who would not sing the songs took the city instead.

The discipline this framework insists on cuts both ways here and should be stated. The Spartiate who made a helot drink and then displayed him to boys had himself been one of those boys, and had learned at seven, from every adult he passed, that this was what such a man was for. He was not a monster of a special kind; he was a formed person acting inside a field his formation had drawn, in which the question of what the helot felt did not arise because nothing had ever put it in front of him. That is what makes the withholding of formation from the majority the most consequential single decision in the whole arrangement. It did not merely leave the helots unpersuaded. It left the Spartiates unable to see that there was anybody there to persuade.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 2, is quoted in E. C. Marchant's

translation (1925) for the Warden and his staff of youths with whips, for modesty and obedience as inseparable companions, for the punishment of the boy who steals badly, and for the rule giving any citizen present authority over the boys; chapter 1 on the physical training of girls and chapter 7 on equal contributions and common living are paraphrased. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* is quoted in Bernadotte Perrin's translation (1914): chapter 21 for the three choruses of old men, young men and boys, and for the king's sacrifice to the Muses before battle; chapter 28 for the helots made drunk and brought into the messes, for their being made to sing base songs and leave the nobler alone, for the Theban episode and the helots' refusal on the plea that their masters did not allow it, and for Plutarch's own view that such cruelties began after the earthquake of 464. The Gymnopaediae with its three choruses dancing naked to the songs of Thaletas and Alcman is reported by Sosibius through Athenaeus and is paraphrased. Tyrtaeus on the compelled lamentation of the conquered is quoted through Pausanias 4.14.5 in W. H. S. Jones's translation (1918), with Pausanias 4.14.4 for the requirement that Messenians attend royal and magisterial funerals with their wives in black on pain of penalty. Herodotus 6.58 on the royal funeral, the cauldrons, the compelled attendance of the subject neighbours and the helots, and the lamentation of many thousands, is quoted in George Rawlinson's translation. Myron of Priene on the dogskin cap, the garment of skins and the stipulated annual beatings survives through Athenaeus and is paraphrased, with his hostility to Sparta and his third-century date noted. The Spartan law requiring the army to be summoned to the king's tent to hear Tyrtaeus is reported by the Athenian orator Lycurgus, *Against Leocrates*, and is paraphrased. Modern scholarship is credited and paraphrased: Nigel Kennell's demonstration that the institution described in the later sources as the *agoge* was substantially reconstructed in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and that the term itself belongs to that later phase, which is the reason the classical picture here rests on Xenophon and the later material is dated where it is used. The distinction between formation and degradation drawn in the closing section is this study's own and is offered as a proposed refinement, not as a reading of any ancient source. Dates are given as conventional: the earthquake and revolt from 464, Leuctra in 371, the Theban invasion of Laconia and the foundation of Messene in 370–369.

NO MAN WOULD GIVE HIM A LIGHT FOR HIS FIRE

Module 5 · The Cost Column — five ledgers in one small country: what the ordinary man got for complying, what it would have cost him not to, and whether there was anywhere better for him to go

Five ledgers, not one

The question this module asks is the plainest one in the framework and the one most often answered lazily: why does the ordinary man comply? Not the king, not the ephor, not the great landholder — the man in the field and the man in the line. What does he get, what does it cost him to refuse, and can he leave?

For most orders the answer can be given once, with a note about the periphery. Sparta will not allow that, because the country contained at least five distinct conditions and the mechanism holding each of them was different. A Spartiate, a demoted Spartiate, a *perioikos*, a Laconian helot and a Messenian helot lived within a day's walk of one another under one government, and no single sentence describes why all five stayed put. Worse — or better, for the analyst — two of those five held the identical legal status and behaved in opposite ways for four hundred years. That contrast is the sharpest natural experiment this collection has yet found, and most of this module is spent on it.

The Spartiate: held by the only thing that was free

Begin with the man the whole arrangement existed for, because his ledger is the most surprising.

His benefit column was as full as any ordinary man's in Greece. He drew an income from land he never worked, delivered by households he did not have to supervise closely. He had leisure — the thing Aristotle says every well-ordered state wants for its citizens and cannot easily get — and he had it from the age of thirty until he died. He had a company of about fifteen men with whom he ate every evening of his life. He had a vote in an assembly, a rank that rose automatically with age, and a citizenship the rest of the Greek world regarded as the most distinguished available. He had, in the plainest

terms, a good life bought with somebody else's work, and he had been formed from the age of seven to want exactly what he had.

His cost column is the striking part, because for most of what mattered it contained no legal penalty at all. Sparta's sanction on its own citizens was social, and Herodotus preserves the definitive case. Aristodemus came home from Thermopylae alive, having been dismissed from the camp with an eye disease while his companion Eurytus turned back blind and died. In Sparta he met, in Herodotus's words, reproach and dishonour — *"no one of the Spartans would either give him light for a fire or speak with him,"* and he was called Aristodemus the coward. The other survivor, Pantites, sent as a messenger to Thessaly and unable to return in time, came home to the same treatment and hanged himself.

Nothing was confiscated. No court sat. No one was flogged. What happened was that a man's neighbours stopped speaking to him and would not lend him fire, and one of the two killed himself rather than live in it. That is the cost column of a fully formed subject, and it is the cheapest one any order can have, because the state pays nothing to maintain it. Every adult in the caste enforces it at no charge, for the same reason every adult could discipline any boy: the sanction is the caste withdrawing itself, and the caste is always present.

Exit for the Spartiate was, in practice, nothing. He owned no movable wealth worth carrying, held no trade, had no skill saleable abroad, and would have arrived anywhere else in Greece as a landless man with an odd accent and no craft. Plutarch reports that citizens were forbidden to live abroad or travel at will, lest they take on foreign habits; the report is late and should be held as such, but Xenophon's complaint that Spartans in his own day were eager for governorships abroad implies something had previously restrained them. The restraint hardly needed a law. A man whose entire capital was his standing among a few thousand people could not take it with him.

The famous maternal instruction to come home with the shield or on it belongs to Plutarch's collection of Spartan sayings, is centuries later than the practice it illustrates, and cannot be treated as evidence for the archaic or classical city. It survives because it states the mechanism accurately: the sanction that held a Spartan in the line was administered at home, by people whose regard was the only currency he had.

The inferior: the ledger nobody balanced

Then the man who had fallen out. A Spartiate who could no longer meet the monthly contribution lost his citizenship, and the men in that condition were numerous enough to have a name — *hypomeiones*, the inferiors.

His benefit column had been emptied while every obligation of his upbringing remained installed. He had been formed from seven to want the standing he no longer had, trained in arms he was still expected to bear, taught that his worth was his place in the line, and then removed from the line. He kept his freedom, his life and whatever land he still held. He did not keep the mess, the assembly, or the regard of the men he had grown up beside.

His cost column contained almost nothing. He had no property worth confiscating, no office to lose, and no social standing left to withdraw. And his exit was equally empty: he was a free man inside Laconia with nowhere better to be, which is not exit at all but stranding.

The framework's expectation for a man in that position is precise — a person with standing and means who has stopped benefiting is where structural change comes from — and Sparta duly produced, from exactly this stratum, the most dangerous internal conspiracy in its recorded history. Xenophon introduces its leader as a young man fine in body and brave in spirit, and not one of the similars. The full account of what Cinadon attempted belongs to the module on collapse. What belongs here is the ledger that made him: an order that formed men completely and then priced a portion of them out of the thing it had formed them for, and never devised any answer for the men left over.

The perioikos: held by a bargain, and only by a bargain

The dwellers-around had a genuinely mixed ledger and it is worth setting out honestly, because the temptation is to read them as victims and they were not.

Their benefit column was substantial. They kept their own towns and governed them, kept their own land, and did the crafts, the trade and the seafaring the Spartiates were closed out of, which made some of them wealthy. They could move about and deal with the outside world in ways a Spartiate could not. And they lived behind the strongest army in Greece without paying for it in the coin the Spartiates paid — no upbringing at seven, no mess dues, no permanent readiness.

Their cost column was one item, and it was large: no voice whatever in the decisions of the state whose wars they fought. They marched where Sparta sent them and their sons died in quarrels they had not been consulted about. Their exit was theoretically open — individuals could and did travel — but a community cannot emigrate, and their towns were where their lives were.

This is a bargain, not a belief. Nothing had been installed in them; no upbringing, no chorus, no doctrine. The framework's expectation for a group held by a bargain is that it holds precisely as long as the bargain looks better than the alternative, and the

record obliges twice. Perioikic communities joined the great rising after the earthquake in the 460s. Perioikoi were prominent in the population of the free Messenian state founded after Leuctra. In both cases the calculation changed because an alternative appeared, and in both cases the answer they gave in deeds was the one the ledger predicts.

The Laconian helot: held by the household

Now the two strata with identical legal status and opposite histories.

The helot's benefit column is real and has to be stated, because the whole shape of the case depends on it. He had a household that stayed together — a wife, children, a continuous family line — which is the single largest thing separating his condition from that of a chattel slave in Athens or Chios, who was bought as an individual, could be sold at any moment, and had no family the law recognised. He had a plot he worked and lived on, and a village. He could not be sold beyond the frontiers or freed at the whim of his master, if the tradition preserved through Ephorus is right; and a later report adds that a master was cursed who demanded more than the customary render. He took part in at least some of the religious life of the country and could reach a sanctuary. Whether the render was a fixed measure or half the crop is disputed in the sources themselves, and if it was a fixed measure then everything above it was his. This is why the ancient categorisers placed the helots *between free men and slaves*: a status recognisably worse than a poor free farmer's and recognisably better, in the things a man's life is made of, than a bought slave's.

His cost column was everything reconstructed earlier in this study: a render taken every year, magistrates who entered office by declaring war on him, young men sent out at night with daggers who preferred to kill the strongest of the men in the fields, a cap and a garment marking his condition, a quota of blows administered annually whether or not he had done anything, and — for the ablest among them — a public offer of freedom that turned out to be a method of identification.

His exit was the mountain. Taygetus was crossable; Arcadia and Messenia lay beyond it; the sanctuary at Taenarum was on the southern cape. But an exit is only worth what waits at the end of it, and for a Laconian helot what waited was a foreign country with no interest in him and a family left behind that he could not carry over a mountain.

The ledger is testable, and the record tests it at the worst possible moment. In 370, with the Spartan army destroyed at Leuctra and a Theban force in Laconia, Sparta offered freedom to any helot who would serve against the invaders. Thousands of Laconian helots took the offer. They did not go over to the liberators; they enlisted

with the men who had held them, in exchange for the one thing they wanted. That is not evidence of loyalty and it should not be read as any. It is evidence of a ledger: offered a real, immediate, individual benefit by a power that could still deliver it, they took it over a collective liberation that was neither immediate nor guaranteed. Sparta, for its part, had understood the same arithmetic for a century — it had been buying helot service with promises of freedom since at least the Pylos campaign, and had once used the offer as a trap.

The Messenian helot: the same status, a different country

Across the mountain, the identical legal condition produced a different history, and the difference is not in the law. It is in the geography and in what the geography made possible.

Messenia was a large, fertile, populous region on the far side of a wall of rock from the men who ruled it, with a coast, and with neighbours — Arcadians, Argives, Eleans — who were Sparta's enemies for other reasons and who would take in a runaway to spite her. Aristotle names this as the structural difference and names it correctly: the Cretans have no such trouble with their serfs, he says, because the neighbouring cities never ally with rebellious serfs, having dependent populations of their own, *"whereas all the neighbours of the Lacedaemonians, whether Argives, Messenians, or Arcadians, were their enemies."*

What that produced is a sequence in which the exit steadily improved. After the earthquake of 464 the rebels held Mount Ithome for years, and when they finally came to terms they left the Peloponnese under safe conduct — and Athens settled them at Naupactus, on the Corinthian Gulf, where they lived as a community calling itself Messenian. In 425 an Athenian force fortified Pylos on the Messenian coast, and helots deserted to it; the garrison included Messenians from Naupactus who knew the country and spoke the dialect, and they raided Laconia. Sparta's response was not to improve the helot's benefit column but to sue for peace, and to insist in the negotiations that the Messenians and helots be withdrawn from Pylos — treating their removal as a war aim comparable to the recovery of its own captured citizens.

Same law, same render, same *krypteia*, same annual declaration. Opposite behaviour. The variable is not the treatment; it is what lay at the end of the road.

The dials, and what the trap actually was

The framework holds that extraction and compliance are set by two dials: how credible the punishing force is, and whether there is any exit. Sparta lets both be read off directly, and it forces a correction to the second.

The credibility of force was maximal everywhere and never withdrew to the margins. That has been established and needs no restating; what this module adds is that the force was doing almost none of the work on the Spartiates, who were held by formation at no cost to the state, and all of the work on the Messenians, and something in between everywhere else. **An order's coercive expenditure is not distributed evenly across its subjects but is concentrated exactly where belief is absent, which is why the same government can look cheap and lawful from one position within it and look like an occupation from another four miles away.**

The exit dial needs re-labelling, and this is the module's contribution. The framework asks whether a subject can leave. Sparta shows that the question is wrongly put, because the physical possibility of leaving barely moved the ledger at all. Taygetus was crossable for the whole four centuries. Boats put in on the Messenian coast throughout. Sanctuaries existed. None of it mattered, and the helots did not empty out of the country. What moved the ledger, when it moved, was never a route; it was the appearance of a *destination* — a place that would receive a man, feed him, and defend him against the power he had run from. The fortified mountain in the 460s. The city of Naupactus after it. The Athenian fort at Pylos in 425. And finally, in 369, a walled polis under Ithome with its own name.

So the dial should be read as the availability of a receiving power, not the availability of an escape. The distinction is not academic, and it has three consequences the corpus can use. It explains why orders tolerate permeable frontiers for centuries without collapsing, and why border control is so often a poor predictor of stability. It explains why the decisive intervention against such an order is not the opening of a road but the founding of a refuge, which is a far larger undertaking and requires an outside power willing to garrison it. And it identifies precisely what an enemy has to do to destroy an order of this kind, which is what Epaminondas did: he did not free the helots, and he did not need to defeat them into freedom. He built them somewhere to arrive.

That reframes the fact this study has been walking toward since its opening. For the Laconian helot the trap was never the mountain — a man alone could cross a mountain. It was that he had a wife and children and a plot, and the mountain was crossable only by a man alone. Where a family could not go, the exit was not an exit.

The moment there was a city on the other side that a family could walk to, four centuries of compliance ended inside a year.

Reading the cost column against the framework

The framework expects one cost column with a note about the periphery, and expects the split between thick and thin belief to run by geography or by caste. Sparta ran it by both at once and produced five ledgers held by five different mechanisms in a country a man could cross in three days: the Spartiate held by formation, at no cost to anyone; the inferior held by nothing at all, and stranded; the perioikos held by a bargain that lasted exactly as long as it looked good; the Laconian helot held by his own household; the Messenian helot held by force alone, and demonstrably not held whenever an alternative appeared.

The finding that follows is not that the framework's model is wrong but that its unit is too large. **An order's stability is not the average of its subjects' ledgers; it is the worst ledger in the country matched against the best exit available to the man holding it.** Sparta's average was excellent — most of the population had something to lose and the ruling caste had a great deal — and the average was irrelevant. Everything that ever threatened the order came from a single pairing: the Messenian helot, who had the emptiest benefit column, standing on the side of the mountain where a receiving power could reach him. Four hundred years of Spartan policy read as a long, expensive and largely successful campaign to prevent that one pairing from being completed, and the order ended in the year it was completed permanently.

Two smaller notes are carried forward. The first is that the helots' benefit column was real and should not be flattened into misery: a household that stays together, a plot, and a family line are not nothing, and they are exactly what a chattel slave elsewhere in Greece did not have. Any account that makes helotage indistinguishable from the mines at Laurium cannot explain why so many stayed for so long, nor why thousands of them enlisted for Sparta in 370 when they were offered something concrete. The second is that the Spartiate's own compliance, which cost the state nothing and is the reason the order could afford everything else, ran on a sanction with no legal content whatever — the withdrawal of fire and conversation. An order that has formed its ruling caste properly does not need to police it, and Sparta's peculiar economy is that it spent nothing at all on the men it needed most and spent everything on the men it needed least to believe anything.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Herodotus 7.229–232 on Aristodemus and Pantites — the dismissal from the camp, the reproach and dishonour, that no Spartan would give him light for a fire or speak

with him, and Pantites' suicide — is quoted and paraphrased from the nineteenth-century English versions of G. C. Macaulay and George Rawlinson; Herodotus 9.71 on Aristodemus's conduct at Plataea is paraphrased. Aristotle, *Politics* 2.9, on why the Cretans suffer no serf risings while all the Lacedaemonians' neighbours were their enemies, is quoted in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885). Thucydides is used in Richard Crawley's translation (1874) and paraphrased: 1.101–103 for the rising after the earthquake, the holding of Ithome and the departure of the rebels under truce and their settlement by Athens at Naupactus; 4.26 for helots induced by promises of freedom to run supplies to Sphacteria; 4.41 for the desertions to the Athenian fort at Pylos and the Messenian raiding of Laconia; 5.35 for Sparta's demand in negotiation that the Messenians and helots be withdrawn from Pylos. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6.5.28–29, for the offer of freedom to Laconian helots in 370 and the thousands who accepted, and *Hellenica* 3.3.5 for Cinadon as a man not among the similars, are paraphrased. The prohibitions on selling helots beyond the frontiers and freeing them at will are reported through Ephorus and are given as tradition; the curse on a master demanding more than the customary render comes from Plutarch's *Moralia* and is likewise given as report. The classification of the helots as standing "between free men and slaves" is the ancient formula preserved in Pollux and elsewhere, and the tension between it and Critias's description of them as slaves to the utmost is noted rather than resolved. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 27 on the restriction of Spartiate travel abroad, and the maternal instruction to return with the shield or upon it from the *Sayings of Spartan Women*, are both reported as Plutarch's, with their lateness flagged; Xenophon's complaint in *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 14 that Spartans of his own day sought office abroad is paraphrased as indirect evidence of an earlier restraint. Modern scholarship is credited where used: Kurt Raaflaub and the contributors to the Luraghi and Alcock volume on the categorisation of helotage against chattel slavery, and Thomas Figueira on the unreliability of helot population figures, which is why no numbers are given here. The distinction between an exit and a receiving power set out in the closing sections is this study's own proposed refinement and is offered as such.

THERE IS NO MONEY IN THE TREASURY

Module 6 · Extraction — what was taken from whom, through a chain one link long, and where a surplus went that never became a building, a fleet, a coinage or a reserve

The size of the render, and why the disagreement matters

Two incompatible accounts survive of what a helot household owed, and this study will not pretend to settle a question the specialists have not settled. What can be done is to set out each version with its provenance and then ask which one the rest of the evidence requires.

The first is proportional. Tyrtaeus, the earliest and only near-contemporary witness, has the conquered bringing their masters, under grievous necessity, *half of all the fruit the ploughland bears*. Pausanias, reporting the terms imposed after the first Messenian war, says the same in prose and makes the point explicitly: no fixed tribute was laid upon them, but they were to bring half of all the produce of their fields to Sparta.

The second is fixed. Plutarch's account of the Lycurgan lot specifies a yield of seventy bushels of barley for the master and twelve for his wife, with wine and oil in proportion — a stated quantity, not a share. Elsewhere the tradition preserves a curse laid on any Spartiate who exacted more than the appointed amount, which only makes sense if there was an appointed amount.

The provenance is not evenly distributed. The proportional version is archaic and Spartan; the fixed version arrives attached to the Lycurgan land-division tradition, which the earlier stage of this study found to be a third-century construction. That would seem to settle it in favour of the half-share, and many have read it so. But the two arrangements have sharply different consequences, and the consequences can be checked against behaviour.

A proportional render makes the master a partner in every harvest. He gains in a good year and loses in a bad one; the cultivator has no upside whatever, since every extra bushel he raises is halved; and — decisively for Sparta — somebody has to be present at the threshing floor to see what the crop was. A fixed render inverts all three. The master's income is stable and the risk falls entirely on the cultivator; everything raised above the quota belongs to the man who raised it, so he has a reason to improve

his ground; and nobody needs to attend the harvest, because the only question is whether the stated measure appears.

The behavioural evidence points hard toward the second, and one datum is close to conclusive. In 223, with Antigonus advancing and Sparta reduced to Laconia, Cleomenes III raised money by an expedient Plutarch records without comment: he set free those helots who could pay down five Attic minas apiece, and thereby raised five hundred talents. Six thousand helot households, that is, each had five minas in cash on hand — a sum in the region of a skilled man's earnings over a year and a half. A population rendering half of everything it grows to a master does not accumulate liquid silver in those quantities. A population rendering a fixed measure and keeping the remainder does.

The honest conclusion is periodised rather than single. The half-share is what the sources describe for the aftermath of conquest, when the arrangement was a punishment imposed on a defeated people; the fixed render is what the classical and Hellenistic evidence requires; and no source records the transition, which may never have been a decision at all. What matters for this study is the reason the fixed render was the arrangement that lasted, and the reason is administrative. **A proportional render requires an apparatus at the point of production; a fixed render requires only that an amount arrive. A conqueror with no officials will end up taking a quota, whatever he began by imposing, because the alternative demands a bureaucracy he does not have.** The extraction mechanism was selected by the absence established at the very beginning of this case.

A chain one link long

The most striking feature of Spartan extraction is what is missing from it.

There were no tax collectors. There was no assessment, no register of holdings, no survey, no receipt, no appeal, no court in which a dispute over the render could be heard, no state granary, and no official of any kind standing between the household that grew the barley and the man who ate it. The helot delivered to a named individual whom he knew by sight and whose father his father had delivered to. That individual then delivered a portion of it, monthly, to a dining club of about fifteen men.

Set that against the collection chains this collection has documented elsewhere — a tax farmer who has bought the right and must clear a profit above the sum he advanced; a landholding intermediary who owes a fixed tribute and keeps whatever he can squeeze above it; a district officer with a quota, a clerk, a register and a police detachment; a chartered company with shareholders. Each link takes a cut, each link has interests of its own, and each link is a place where the state's demand can be

mistaken for the intermediary's greed. Sparta had none of them. The chain from producer to consumer had one link, and the whole apparatus of extraction consisted of a man walking to another man's house.

This is what the absence of an inheritable apparatus means when it reaches the fiscal domain. There was nothing to capture, so nothing was captured; and rather than build a revenue machine — which would have required a literate class, a survey, and officials the Spartiates were forbidden to become — Sparta simply distributed the population among the conquerors and let each man collect his own. It is the cheapest extraction system in the corpus and also the crudest, and the two facts are the same fact.

The order that took everything and built nothing

Where did it go? The answer is startling enough that it is worth stating in the words of the men who noticed.

Aristotle, cataloguing the defects of the Spartan constitution: *"the revenues of the state are ill-managed; there is no money in the treasury, and yet they are obliged to carry on great wars, and they are unwilling to pay taxes. The greater part of the land being in the hands of the Spartans, they do not look closely into one another's contributions."* A generation earlier, Archidamus had told the Spartan assembly on the eve of the war with Athens that they were not wealthy in public funds and did not readily contribute from private ones — a king warning his own people, at the moment of decision, that the state had no money.

And Thucydides, in the passage quoted at the opening of this study: if Sparta were deserted and only the temples and the foundations of its buildings remained, later ages would refuse to believe her power, because her city was neither consolidated nor adorned with costly temples and public edifices but settled in villages in the old way of Hellas.

Put those together and the result is one of the strangest fiscal profiles in the ancient world. Sparta held the largest servile agricultural population in Greece and drew on it for three centuries. It built no monumental capital, accumulated no treasury, issued no coinage, maintained no navy of its own, and financed its greatest war largely on Persian subsidy. The surplus of an entire conquered country passed through the arrangement and left almost no durable trace, because it was consumed — as barley, wine, cheese, figs and meat, eaten in the evening, in a room, by fifteen men.

That is not waste in the moral sense and it should not be scored as failure. What Sparta bought with the surplus was the one thing the arrangement required and no other Greek state could afford: several thousand adult men permanently released from work. Every mess dinner was the maintenance cost of a full-time soldier who had been a

full-time soldier since childhood, and the reason no rival could copy the Spartan army was that no rival could feed one. The surplus went into leisure, and leisure was converted into the only capital Sparta accumulated, which was drill.

The rule against converting it

An extraction system is also defined by what it forbids, and here Sparta legislated with unusual precision.

Xenophon reports that citizens were forbidden to engage in money-making, and describes the currency arrangement that enforced it: a coinage of iron so heavy and so worthless that a substantial sum required a storeroom to hold and a wagon to move. Plutarch's version adds that the metal was deliberately spoiled in the quenching so that it could not even be worked into anything useful. The details of the iron money tradition are debatable and its Lycurgan attribution belongs with the rest of that literature, but the substance is corroborated by the plain absence of Spartan silver coinage in a period when every other significant Greek state minted, and by Aristotle's complaint that there was nothing in the treasury.

Read as an extraction design rather than as a moral eccentricity, the prohibition does something specific. It prevents the surplus from being converted into a form that is portable, concealable and accumulable. A Spartiate could not turn his barley into silver, his silver into more land in another city, or his wealth into a house that announced it. What he could do was eat it, in public, at a table where every man's contribution was identical. The whole economy was thereby funnelled toward a single terminus, and that terminus was the institution that constituted citizenship.

The consequence for the other castes follows directly and is the clearest instance of extraction sorted by caste this study can show. Somebody had to make the weapons, work the bronze, build the ships, sail them, carry the goods and handle the money — and it could not be a Spartiate, who was forbidden, or a helot, who was in the fields. It was the *perioikoi*, and their share of the arrangement was not a render in kind but a monopoly on every economic function the ruling caste had closed to itself. The three-way sort is complete and it is exact: the helots produced the food, the perioikoi produced everything else and handled the money, and the Spartiates produced nothing at all and consumed the food in a room.

What nobody paid

The column that is empty in this ledger is the state's. Sparta had no regular taxation of its citizens, no treasury worth the name, and therefore no capacity to spend on

anything the citizens had not already decided to fund privately. The kings drew estates in perioikic land and shares of sacrifices and booty; the mess dues fed the army; and beyond that the public purse barely existed.

The consequences ran deep and are not incidental to the story of what happened to Sparta. A state that cannot accumulate cannot build a fleet, and Sparta could not fight Athens without borrowing one, first from its allies and then from Persia. A state with no treasury cannot pay soldiers, so its army must consist of men who are already fed, which caps its size at the number of Spartiates plus whatever allies will serve. And a state with no fiscal machinery has no instrument for the redistribution that might have arrested the concentration of land, which was the process quietly emptying the citizen body throughout the same period. When Lysander finally brought in the wealth of an empire, the order had no institutional means of absorbing it and no experience of handling it, and what arrived was not revenue but private fortunes in the hands of individual commanders. That story belongs to the module on collapse. Its origin belongs here.

The take that could not be dressed as anything else

One last property of this arrangement deserves recording, because it closes a loop opened three modules ago.

Extraction in most orders is mediated, and the mediation does moral work. Where a subject pays a tax to an official who remits it to a treasury that funds an army, a road and a court, the take can be presented — sometimes truthfully — as the price of things the payer receives. Where it passes through a tax farmer, the resentment attaches to the farmer rather than to the state. Where it is assessed by a register and collected by a clerk, the demand acquires the impersonality of a rule. Every additional link in the chain is an opportunity to make the transfer look like something other than one man taking food from another.

Sparta had no links. A helot carried a measure of barley to the door of a man he knew, who ate it. There was no official to blame, no rule to invoke, no public work to point at, no treasury in whose name the demand was made. The transfer was as visible as a transfer can be, and it was visible to both parties in exactly the same terms.

The length of the extraction chain determines whether the take can be mystified, and a one-link chain cannot be. This is worth adding to the framework because it explains something the module on the robe left standing as a puzzle. Sparta produced no doctrine of helotage — no account addressed to the helots explaining why their condition was right. The first reason, established earlier, is that their belief was not needed. The second reason is now visible: there was no institutional distance in which

such an account could have been staged. A doctrine of just extraction requires a middle term — a state, a god's portion, a common defence, a public good — standing between the giver and the taker and receiving the thing in its own name. Nothing stood between the helot and the Spartiate. Whatever story might have been told, the barley went from one man's field to another man's dinner, and both of them could see it.

Reading extraction against the framework

The framework asks what is taken, by what mechanism, and where it goes, and expects extraction in a conquest order to be sorted by caste. Sparta sorts by caste with unusual clarity — food from the helots, manufacture and money from the *perioikoi*, nothing at all from the Spartiates but the service the whole arrangement exists to fund — and the sorting is enforced not only by custom but by a prohibition on citizens engaging in the excluded activities.

The contribution this module makes is about mechanism, and it develops the finding this case has been generating since the Landscape. **An order's extraction mechanism is selected by the administrative apparatus it has, not by the amount it wishes to take.** Sparta wanted, at the outset, half of everything, and the earliest evidence says it took half; but a proportional share requires a presence at the harvest that a conquering caste of a few thousand men, forbidden to do any work and required to be permanently under arms, could not sustain across two regions divided by a mountain. What the arrangement settled into was the mechanism that needs no apparatus at all: a stated measure, delivered by the producer, to a named individual, with everything above it left where it lay. That mechanism is cheap, robust and almost impossible to administer badly, because there is nothing to administer. It also has two consequences the order never escaped. It left the cultivator as residual claimant, which is why helots accumulated enough silver that six thousand of them could each produce five minas when freedom was finally offered at a price. And it produced a transfer so short and so visible that no story could be draped over it.

The second finding follows from the first and is offered as a general proposition to be tested: **the number of links in an extraction chain determines how much moral work the extraction can be made to do.** A long chain lets a state present a take as a contribution, a duty, a rent, a tithe, or the price of order, because at every link the thing changes hands under a different description. A chain of one link presents extraction as what it is. Orders with long chains can and do build doctrines of just taxation; orders with short chains generally do not bother, and Sparta did not.

And the last observation is the one that ought to sit uncomfortably. This was the most thoroughly extractive arrangement in the Greek world, running for three

centuries over two fertile regions, and it produced no city, no temple worth remarking, no fleet, no coinage, no library, no treasury, and no public work that survived to be looked at. Rome's extraction left aqueducts; the Nile's left pyramids; Athens's tribute left the buildings on the Acropolis. Sparta's left the reputation of an army and a set of anecdotes. That is not an argument that the others were better, and this study will not make one. But it is worth recording plainly that an order which consumes its entire surplus in maintaining the men who take it has, at the end, nothing to show anyone — including itself — and that when the surplus stopped arriving there was no accumulated capital of any kind to fall back on. The arrangement was a machine for turning a country's harvest into the leisure of the men who held it, and when the country was taken away in a single year, everything the machine had produced went with it.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Aristotle, *Politics* 2.9, on the ill-managed revenues, the empty treasury, the unwillingness to pay taxes and the failure to look closely into one another's contributions, is quoted in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885). Tyrtaeus on the half-share is quoted through Pausanias 4.14.5 in W. H. S. Jones's translation (1918), with Pausanias 4.14.4 for the explicit statement that no fixed tribute was imposed. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 8 for the yield of seventy bushels and twelve, and *Lycurgus* 9 for the iron currency, are from Bernadotte Perrin's translation (1914) and are treated as belonging to the Lycurgan tradition whose third-century provenance was established in Module 2. Plutarch's *Cleomenes* 23 — that Cleomenes freed those helots who could pay five Attic minas and thereby raised five hundred talents, arming two thousand of them — is quoted from Perrin; the episode is dated to 223 and applies to Laconian helots in the Hellenistic period, and no claim is made here that it describes archaic conditions. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 7, on the prohibition of money-making and on the iron currency requiring a storeroom and a wagon, is paraphrased. Thucydides is used in Richard Crawley's translation (1874): 1.10.2 on the absence of costly temples and public buildings is quoted in the opening module of this study and referred back to here, and Archidamus's warning at 1.80 that Sparta was not wealthy in public funds and did not readily contribute from private ones is paraphrased rather than quoted. The tradition of a curse on any master exacting more than the appointed render is preserved in Plutarch's *Moralia* and is given as report. Modern scholarship is credited and paraphrased: Stephen Hodkinson's work on Spartan property and on the direction of the agrarian economy, which argues for a fixed rather than proportional render and against the picture of helotage as a uniformly supervised regime; Jean Ducat's contrary emphasis, and the general state of the disagreement, which is real and

unresolved and is presented here as unresolved. The valuation of five minas against a skilled worker's earnings is an approximation from the standard Attic drachma wage rates of the period and should be read as an order of magnitude only. The two propositions advanced in the closing section — that the extraction mechanism is selected by the available apparatus, and that the length of the chain governs how much moral work the take can be made to do — are this study's own and are offered as proposals for testing against other cases in the collection.

THEY CHISELLED OFF THE VERSES

Module 7 · Information and Suppression — an order with no metropole to deceive, managing its reputation before a horizontal field of rival and allied cities, while the country on the other side of the seam produced not one surviving line in four hundred years

A seam with no sea in it

In the colonial cases this collection has assembled, the seam is a physical thing. What is said in Paris and what is done in Algeria are separated by a fortnight's sailing, and the order's core administrative task is to keep the two ends from meeting. The distance does the work; the despatch is the instrument; the scandal, when it comes, is a letter that reached the wrong desk.

Sparta has no such geometry. There is no metropole, no ocean, no despatch, and the men who ruled Messenia ate their dinner within sight of the mountain behind which it lay. If the framework's seam is only a colonial artefact, this case should show nothing.

It shows a great deal, and the reason is a correction the colonial cases themselves invite. The information effort in those studies was never aimed simply at a home government. Italy's management of Eritrea and Somalia was conducted with London, Berlin and Paris in view — the European metropolis as a collective, a field of peer powers whose recognition determined whether Italy counted as an empire at all. The audience was horizontal, not vertical. Read that way, the question to put to Sparta is not *where was the metropole* but *whose recognition did this order require*, and the answer is immediate and undisputed: the Greek world. Sparta's hegemony rested on allies who followed voluntarily, on a reputation for good order that made other cities' oligarchs want Spartan arbitration, and on a standing at Delphi and Olympia that no army could compel. That standing was Sparta's largest asset and the only one that could be taken away without a battle.

This module reconstructs how it was protected, and what lay on the other side.

Expulsion as a method

The most conspicuous instrument was the periodic expulsion of foreigners, and its purpose was stated most clearly by an enemy. Pericles, defining Athens against Sparta before an Athenian audience, put it as a boast: *"We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing,*

although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality." The phrase names the Spartan practice precisely and names its function. What was being denied to foreigners was the opportunity of *learning or observing* — not trade, not residence in the abstract, but sight.

Plutarch, later, gives the same practice with a different rationale, the Lycurgan one: that strange people bring strange doctrines and would corrupt the citizens. Both explanations may be true at once; a policy that prevents Spartans from hearing outside ideas also prevents outsiders from seeing inside arrangements, and it is the second effect this module is concerned with, because the record of what visitors could and could not report bears it out.

The critical observation is about direction. Expulsion protected nothing against the helots, who lived in the country, worked the fields, attended the funerals and knew everything there was to know. It protected against people who could carry an account elsewhere and be believed there. The instrument therefore identifies its own audience: an order that expels observers rather than silencing its own subjects is managing a reputation, not maintaining a secret.

The concealment of strength

The second instrument was the suppression of numbers, and the best evidence for it is a historian's frustration.

Thucydides, describing the battle of Mantinea in 418, wanted to state how many Lacedaemonians were present and could not. The number, he says, could not be accurately ascertained owing to the secrecy of their government, and he had to reconstruct it by counting the visible frontage of the line and multiplying by the known depth of the files. This is a man with excellent Peloponnesian sources, writing about the largest land battle of the war, reduced to arithmetic from a distance because the participants would not say.

A state conceals its strength from enemies as a matter of course. Sparta concealed it from allies too, and from the whole Greek reading public, and did so consistently enough that the best-informed observer of the age had to estimate. The effect was not only military. An army whose size cannot be counted cannot be shown to be shrinking, and the previous modules have established that it was shrinking throughout precisely this period. Concealment of numbers protected a reputation for irresistibility during the decades when the reality behind it was quietly draining away.

The state that wrote nothing

The third instrument is the largest and the easiest to overlook, because it consists of an absence.

Sparta produced no history of itself. It published no decrees on stone in the manner of Athens, whose tribute lists, honours, treaties and accounts were cut into marble and set up where anyone could read them. It kept no archive that anyone reports. It produced no orators, no tragedians, no philosophers, and after the archaic poets — Tyrtaeus, Alcman — essentially no literature at all for three centuries. When a Spartan king or ephor needed to communicate, it was by a message of famous brevity; the *laconic* answer entered the language as a style, and it is worth noticing what a style of that kind actually does, which is to decline to explain.

This was not illiteracy. Sparta had the Rhetra, sent written despatches, maintained lists of Olympic victors and had men who could read a message. It was a policy of not producing a record, and its consequence is the single most important fact about the evidence base of this entire study: **every substantial surviving account of Sparta was written by a foreigner.** Herodotus, an Ionian. Thucydides, an exiled Athenian. Xenophon, an Athenian exile who fought for Sparta, admired it and sent his sons through its upbringing. Critias, an Athenian oligarch and admirer. Aristotle, a Macedonian resident in Athens. Plutarch, a Boeotian writing five centuries later. Plato, whose ideal city borrowed heavily from what he understood Sparta to be.

An order that writes nothing and admits selected visitors does not lose control of its story. It hands the telling to people who came because they were already sympathetic, and who saw what they were shown. That is the mechanism behind what modern scholarship calls the Spartan mirage, and it is not a metaphor for exaggeration but a description of a process: a documentary vacuum, filled by admirers, hardening into the only available account.

Correcting the record where it counted

The fourth instrument was active, and there is one clean documented case of it.

After Plataea, the victorious Greeks dedicated a golden tripod on a column of bronze serpents at Delphi. Pausanias, the Spartan regent who had commanded, had a couplet inscribed on it claiming the victory as his own — that having destroyed the army of the Medes as leader of the Greeks, he dedicated this memorial to Apollo. Thucydides records what happened next: the Lacedaemonians immediately chiselled off the verses and inscribed on the tripod, by name, all the cities that had shared in overthrowing the barbarian.

A later tradition, preserved in an Athenian courtroom speech, tells it differently: that the Greeks were enraged, that the Plataeans brought a suit before the Amphictyonic council on behalf of the allies, and that the Lacedaemonians were *compelled* to erase the inscription and substitute the cities' names. Which version is right matters less than what both agree on. The contested object was a text at the panhellenic sanctuary, the stake was whether Sparta appeared as a hegemon among allies or as a man taking credit from them, and the resolution was performed with a chisel.

That is where Spartan investment went. The city built no monuments at home — the point Thucydides made about the ruins that would one day mislead posterity — and dedicated at Delphi and Olympia, which were the venues where Greek reputation was published. The allocation is exact and it is the same allocation this study found in the doctrine and the settlement: nothing whatever spent on the audience below, real expenditure on the audience whose recognition the order required.

What was on the other side

Against all this, set the events the same order preferred not to have an account of.

Two thousand helots, publicly offered freedom for distinguished service, publicly crowned, taken round the temples — and then, in Thucydides' words, the Spartans *"did away with them, and no one ever knew how each of them perished."* The clause is doing precise work. A mass killing was carried out in a small country by a government that had just made the victims conspicuous, and the method left no account: no trial, no announcement, no bodies produced, no procedure anyone could describe. Whatever else it was, it was designed not to be narratable.

The *krypteia* worked to the same specification. Young men went out at night, killed in the countryside, and returned. There was no charge, no sentence, no register of the dead. And the legal instrument examined in the first module — the ephors' annual declaration of war — is, among other things, an anticipatory answer to any question about the killings' status: they were acts of war, and acts of war require no explanation.

The seam was not sealed. The killing of the helot suppliants at Taenarum leaked, and what happened to it afterwards proves the audience conclusively. It did not become a grievance among helots, who had no forum in which a grievance could be lodged. It became a diplomatic instrument in Athenian hands, raised in negotiation as a pollution the Lacedaemonians should be required to drive away — a demand made by a rival state, before the Greek world, about Sparta's standing with the gods. The one Spartan atrocity that crossed the seam was picked up by a peer and used as a peer would use it.

The suppression that needed no censor

And then the other end of the seam, where the finding of this module lies.

From the conquest to the liberation, Messenia produced no text. Not a chronicle, not a poem, not an inscription, not a letter, not a name written by a Messenian hand that survives. The whole of the narrative in Pausanias's fourth book — the twenty-year war, the heroes, the sieges, the oracles — is a Hellenistic literary reconstruction assembled centuries after the fact, and it exists in that form for one reason: there was nothing else. When the Messenians became a free people in 369 and needed a past, they had to build one, largely out of Spartan and panhellenic materials, and the traces of that construction are what modern scholarship has been unpicking.

This is worth stating as plainly as the evidence allows. **The most complete form of information control is not censorship. It is the withholding of the means of record from a subject population, after which nothing needs to be suppressed because nothing is produced.** Sparta never had to burn a Messenian book or silence a Messenian historian. It withheld formation — the finding of the fourth module — and formation is what produces people who write. Four centuries of experience by a population numbering in the tens of thousands vanished without a single act of censorship being required, and the silence is so total that specialists today argue about whether the people in question even understood themselves as a people.

Compare the effort a state must expend to censor a literate subject population: the licensers, the seizures, the prosecutions, the smuggled presses, the martyrs the prosecutions create. Sparta spent nothing and achieved more. The cost was paid elsewhere, in the terms this study has been assembling — an unformed population believes nothing, so the order must be held by force for ever — but on this one axis the arrangement was not merely effective but total.

Reading information and suppression against the framework

The framework holds that a colonial order's seam runs between metropole and colony, that distance is what holds it open, and that the order's core task is preventing the two ends from meeting. Sparta has no metropole and no distance, and the seam is nonetheless the most legible feature of its information regime. Two revisions follow.

The first concerns the audience, and it confirms a correction the colonial cases themselves suggested. **The target of an order's information management is whoever can withdraw something it needs, and that is characteristically a horizontal field of peers rather than a home public.** Italy managed Eritrea's reputation before London, Berlin and Paris because great-power standing was conferred by great powers.

Sparta managed its reputation before Delphi, Olympia and the assemblies of allied cities because the hegemony of Greece was conferred by Greeks. In neither case was the subject population an audience at all, and in neither case is the effort explained by the existence of a metropolitan electorate. What identifies the audience is not where it lives but what it can take away. This should be carried into the colonial studies as well: the metropolitan public matters where it can withhold funds and men, and the peer powers matter where they can withhold recognition, and an order will speak to whichever of them holds the thing it cannot do without.

The second concerns what holds the seam open, and it follows from the same logic as the exit finding two modules back. The colonial seam is not held by distance; distance is merely one way of producing the condition that actually matters, which is that the two ends have **no common medium of record**. Paris and the Algerian countryside were kept apart by a sea, but they were kept apart far more effectively by the fact that what happened in the countryside was written down, if at all, by the men who did it. Sparta achieved the same separation across a hundred miles and one mountain, because the peer world read and wrote and published on stone, and the helots did neither. The seam was not a distance to be maintained. It was an asymmetry of literacy, and it was produced by the same decision that produced everything else in this case: the refusal to form the majority.

There is a third observation, and it is the most uncomfortable one available in this study. The Spartan information regime did not merely work at the time. It is still working. An order that wrote nothing, expelled observers, concealed its numbers, killed without leaving an account, and admitted a small number of sympathetic foreigners who then wrote the only surviving descriptions, has enjoyed two and a half thousand years of favourable press composed almost entirely by its own selected witnesses — while the country it held for four centuries left not one line of testimony. This study has been assembled out of that same material and cannot escape it. Every quotation in every module of this case comes from an outsider, an admirer, a hostile rival, or a compiler five centuries late. There is no Messenian voice to set against them, and the reason there is none is itself the largest single fact this case has to report.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Thucydides is quoted in Richard Crawley's translation (1874): 2.39.1 for Pericles on Athens throwing open her city and never excluding foreigners from the opportunity of learning or observing; 4.80.4 for the two thousand helots and the statement that no one ever knew how each of them perished; 5.68.2 for the impossibility of ascertaining Spartan numbers owing to the secrecy of their government, and the reconstruction from frontage and file depth; 1.132.2–3 for Pausanias's couplet on the tripod at Delphi

and the Lacedaemonians' immediate chiselling off of the verses and substitution of the names of the cities. The variant tradition — that the erasure was compelled by a suit brought by the Plataeans on the allies' behalf before the Amphictyonic council — comes from the pseudo-Demosthenic *Against Neaera* and is given as the divergent account it is; Cornelius Nepos's *Pausanias* preserves a third version substantially agreeing with Thucydides. Thucydides 1.128 on the curse of Taenarus, cited in Module 3, is referred back to here. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 27 on the expulsion of foreigners and its rationale is paraphrased from Bernadotte Perrin's translation (1914) and is flagged as late. The characterisation of Spartan epigraphic and literary output rests on the general state of the record rather than on any single ancient statement, and readers should note that Laconian dedicatory inscriptions do exist; the contrast drawn here is with the volume and public character of Athenian documentary publication, not a claim that Sparta inscribed nothing. Modern scholarship is credited and paraphrased: the concept of the Spartan mirage, formulated by François Ollier and developed since, for the process by which a documentary vacuum filled by admirers hardened into the standard account; Nino Luraghi on the construction of Messenian historical memory after 369 and on the character of Pausanias's fourth book as a Hellenistic literary reconstruction; Nigel Kennell on the later reinvention of Spartan institutions for visitors. The two propositions advanced in the closing section — that an order's information effort is directed at whoever can withdraw what it needs, and that a seam is held open by the absence of a common medium of record rather than by distance — are this study's own and are offered for testing against the colonial cases in the collection, where the first in particular was suggested by the Italian material before it was found here.

ALL THE PARTS OF THE STATE MUST WISH THAT IT SHOULD EXIST

Module 8 · Elite Coordination and the Default — why men who distrusted one another kept the same arrangement running for four centuries without producing a single tyrant, and what it cost them that nobody was able to change it

The rule, stated by a contemporary

This collection has been assembling, case by case, an observation about durable hierarchies: that the ones which last are arranged so that each person of standing within them defends the whole simply by defending his own position, with the result that the arrangement is protected by default, by people who need not like or trust one another and need not intend anything of the kind.

Sparta supplies something no other case in the collection has supplied, which is that a contemporary observer states the principle himself, in general terms, and names Sparta as the demonstration. Aristotle, in the middle of a chapter otherwise devoted to criticising the Spartan constitution, pauses to explain why the ephorate — an office he thinks badly filled and dangerously powerful — nonetheless holds the state together:

> *The Ephoralty certainly does keep the state together; for the people are contented when they have a share in the highest office... For if a constitution is to be permanent, all the parts of the state must wish that it should exist and the same arrangements be maintained. This is the case at Sparta, where the kings desire its permanence because they have due honour in their own persons; the nobles because they are represented in the council of elders, the office of elder being a reward of virtue; and the people, because all are eligible to the ephoralty.*

That is the whole mechanism in four clauses, and the striking thing is the order of the reasoning. Aristotle does not say the Spartans were unusually patriotic, or that Lycurgus was unusually wise, or that the constitution was well designed in the abstract — he has just spent several pages arguing the opposite. He says that permanence requires *every part of the state to want the arrangement to continue*, and then shows that at Sparta each part does, because each holds something inside it that exists nowhere

else. The kings hold honour; the notables hold the council; the ordinary Spartiate holds the possibility of the ephorate. Nobody is defending the constitution. Everybody is defending his own share, and the constitution is what the shares are made of.

This module reconstructs those shares, shows the machinery that kept any one of them from swallowing the others, and then locates the fracture — which arrived exactly where the framework predicts, and in a form the arrangement had manufactured itself.

What each part actually held

The kings. Two hereditary lines, Agiad and Eurypontid, each claiming descent from Heracles, holding the position for life and passing it to a son. Herodotus catalogues the privileges, and the catalogue is instructive because it is mostly not power. The kings held two priesthoods and made the public sacrifices on the state's behalf. They led the army wherever it was sent. They received the hides and the chines of sacrificed beasts, double portions at dinner, seats of honour, an escort. They were assigned choice land in a number of the *perioikic* communities. At their deaths the whole country was compelled to mourn, and Xenophon says the honours were designed to mark them not as men but as something more.

A king's position was therefore hereditary, sacral, ceremonial and military — and almost entirely dependent on the constitution continuing to recognise it. He held no independent revenue base large enough to raise a private army, no fortress, no bureaucracy of his own. Take away the arrangement and a Spartan king is a landholder with a famous name.

The elders. Twenty-eight men over the age of sixty, plus the two kings, sitting for life. They prepared the business that came before the assembly, tried capital cases, and — under the rider examined in the third module — could set aside a decision of the people they judged crooked. Election was by acclamation: candidates passed before the assembled citizens and the loudest shout won, a procedure Aristotle calls childish and open to management. Aristotle also objects that men who judge the gravest cases should not hold office for life, *"for the mind grows old as well as the body,"* and that the elders were accountable to nobody.

For a Spartiate, this was the terminal prize of an entire life. It could not be bought, could not be inherited, and could not be reached before sixty, which meant it could only be won by outlasting and outperforming every man of one's own age cohort in the estimation of the whole citizen body. Aristotle's phrase for it is exact: the office of elder is *a reward of virtue*. A man who has spent seventy years accumulating the regard that alone can produce that reward has no conceivable interest in a change of regime.

The ephors. Five men, elected annually from the whole citizen body, ineligible for re-election. Their powers were extraordinary: they presided over the assembly and the council, received foreign embassies, could arrest and prosecute a king, sent out the *krypteia*, declared war on the helots on entering office, accompanied the king on campaign to watch him, and — alone among Spartans — did not rise from their seats when a king entered.

Aristotle regards the office as dangerous, badly elected and open to bribery, and says its power was so great and so tyrannical that even kings had to court its holders. But he identifies its function precisely, and it is the load-bearing element of the whole system: the ordinary Spartiate is content because the highest office in the state is open to him. Not held by him — open to him. It is a lottery ticket, drawn annually, that costs nothing and cannot be monopolised, and its existence gives several thousand armed men a permanent stake in a constitution most of them will never hold office under.

The machinery that kept the parts apart

A distribution of shares only produces the default if no shareholder can convert his share into all the others. Sparta's arrangements against that conversion were unusually thorough, and they operated by a single principle: every route to accumulation ran through something that expired, or was doubled, or was watched by a man whose own position depended on watching it.

The kingship was doubled. There were always two kings, of two houses, and Herodotus reports that the founding pair quarrelled all their lives and that their descendants continued the feud. Whatever the truth of the origin story, the effect is what matters: an ambitious Agiad's most immediate obstacle was a Eurypontid, and each king's best available protection against the other was the constitution that limited both.

The ephorate expired. Five men held the most formidable powers in the state for twelve months and then returned to private life, subject to the next board — men who would be their neighbours at dinner. No ephor could build a following, because the office that would have to sustain it was gone within the year, and the man who took it over had every reason to look into his predecessor's conduct.

The council was slow, collective and old. It could block but not command, and its members had reached it too late in life to found anything.

The assembly consented but could not initiate, and could be dissolved if it decided crookedly.

And the whole relation between crown and state was renewed as a ritual, twelve times a year, in the most economical statement of the default that this collection has

found. Xenophon records that the ephors and the king exchanged oaths monthly, the ephors on the state's behalf and the king for himself. *"And this is the King's oath: 'I will reign according to the established laws of the state.' And this the oath of the state: 'While you abide by your oath, we will keep the kingship unshaken.'"*

Read that as a contract and it is exact. The king's tenure is guaranteed by the state, conditional on his staying inside the law; the law is guaranteed by the king, conditional on the state protecting his position. Each party's security is the other's compliance, and the whole thing is re-executed every month so that neither can drift. It is the default rendered as liturgy.

The evidence that it worked

The proof is negative and it is very large. Thucydides notes that Sparta obtained good laws early, enjoyed unbroken freedom from tyrants, and had held the same form of government for more than four hundred years. In a Greek world in which almost every substantial city passed through tyranny, faction, exile and constitutional overthrow — often repeatedly — a community of several thousand armed men, with no police, no standing bureaucracy, no written code, and (as Module 2 established) very large inequalities of land, produced not one successful usurper across four centuries.

And it disciplined its own without difficulty. Kings were deposed, fined, exiled and killed. Demaratus was removed from the kingship after his colleague procured a favourable answer from Delphi. Pleistoanax was exiled. Agis was fined. Pausanias, the victor of Plataea, was walled up in a temple and starved when the ephors moved against him. The apex did not merely survive its most dangerous members; it consumed them, repeatedly, without the constitution being altered in the process.

The clearest test came at the end of the fifth century with Lysander, who had done what no Spartan had ever done — won the war, taken Athens, and built across the Aegean a personal network of ten-man juntas staffed by his own partisans, with cities voting him honours that ran to the edge of worship. Here was a man with an external revenue base, a client system beyond the reach of the ephors, and the prestige of total victory. The tradition adds that he schemed to open the kingship, whether to all Heraclids or to all Spartiates; the sources for that plot are late and circumstantial and it is safest to hold it as tradition rather than fact.

What is not in doubt is how Sparta handled him. He was not tried, not exiled, not killed. He was simply not given anything further to command, and the decarchies were dismantled. The most powerful Spartan of his generation was neutralised by the expiry of his appointments, because there was no office he could hold that did not run out,

and no faction that gained more from backing him than from the arrangement that limited him. He died a few years later in a minor battle in Boeotia. That is what a working default looks like: the system does not have to defeat its threats, because nobody inside it profits from their success.

The coordination that ran outside the borders

The default did not stop at Laconia, and this is where the Spartan case joins the pattern the collection has found in the imperial studies.

Sparta's hegemony over the Peloponnese and beyond rested on a consistent policy of supporting oligarchic factions in allied cities. The mechanism is the default extended across borders: an allied oligarch's position within his own city depended on Spartan power, so his defence of his own standing was a defence of Spartan hegemony, and Sparta acquired in every allied city a party with a private interest in its continuation. No garrison could have bought as much.

The most remarkable instance runs across the battle lines. The peace concluded between Athens and Sparta in 421, in the middle of a generation-long war for the mastery of Greece, contained a clause providing that if the slave population rose, the Athenians should come to the Lacedaemonians' assistance with all their strength. Athens — the democracy, the enemy, the power that had garrisoned Pylos precisely to encourage helot desertion — contracted in writing to help suppress a Spartan servile rising. Whatever the clause's practical weight, its presence records something the framework should note carefully: **the coordination that defends a hierarchy can extend to the elites of hostile states, because a rising of the ruled is a different category of event from a war between rulers, and men who are trying to destroy each other may still prefer that the category holds.**

Where it broke

The framework holds that fracture comes not from the mass but from a group with standing and means that has stopped benefiting. Sparta's fracture is unusually well documented, and it has a feature that sharpens the general claim considerably: the disaffected group was one the arrangement had manufactured itself.

In 399, an informer came to the ephors with news of a conspiracy. Xenophon's account of what he told them is the most valuable passage in this case.

The leader was Cinadon — a young man, fine in body and brave in spirit, employed by the magistrates on missions of trust, and not one of the *homoioi*. He had taken the informer to the edge of the market-place and told him to count the Spartiates present.

There were about forty. Those men, he said, were the enemies; and all the others in the market-place, more than four thousand of them, were the allies. Walking through the streets he pointed out enemies one and two at a time and named everyone else an ally, and said that on the country estates there would be one enemy, the master, and many allies. The conspiracy, when it was unwound, was found to include *hypomeiones*, freed helots serving as soldiers, *perioikoi* and helots — which is to say every category of Lacedaemonian except the one in the market-place.

And when Cinadon was taken and asked what he had wanted, his answer was not a programme. He said he had done it in order to be inferior to no one in Lacedaemon.

That is the fracture point stated by the man standing on it. He did not want to abolish the arrangement; he wanted to be inside it on equal terms, and the arrangement had no mechanism whatever for letting him in. The men Sparta had formed from the age of seven, trained in arms, and then priced out when they could no longer meet the monthly contribution were not a mass of the discontented. They were people with standing, means, military competence and access — Cinadon was employed on the state's business — who had been given every capability the order could confer and then given nothing to use it on. The membership rule established in Module 2 only ever subtracted. There was no route back in and no route in from below, so the pool of formed, capable, excluded men could only grow.

Aristotle, writing a generation later, gives the arithmetic of what that did: the country could support fifteen hundred cavalry and thirty thousand hoplites, and the number of Spartan citizens fell below a thousand; the city sank under a single defeat, and *want of men was their ruin*.

The shadow of the default

Here the case makes its contribution, and it is a hard one, because it identifies a cost inside the mechanism the collection has been treating as the mark of successful orders.

An arrangement in which every part defends the whole by defending its own share is superbly protected against capture. It is, by exactly the same design, almost impossible to amend. Every Spartan organ was constructed to check another; none was constructed to change anything. The kings could not legislate. The council could block but was elderly, unaccountable and appointed for life. The ephors held immense power for twelve months and had no horizon beyond it — a man with one year and no possibility of re-election has every incentive to manage the present and none to restructure the future. The assembly could not initiate and could be dissolved if it decided crookedly. And the doctrine, as Module 3 established, held the whole thing to

be divinely authorised and unchanged for four hundred years, so that any proposal for structural reform arrived pre-labelled as impiety.

The consequence is visible and it was visible at the time. The single problem that was destroying Sparta — land concentrating through inheritance, gift and dowry while the qualification for citizenship remained a fixed monthly delivery, so that the citizen body shrank every generation — was diagnosed correctly by Aristotle and was obvious to anyone who could count spears in the market-place. It ran for well over a century. No organ of the Spartan state ever addressed it, because no organ of the Spartan state could. When it was finally addressed, in the 240s and 220s, it was addressed by kings acting outside the constitution, proposing to cancel debts and redistribute land under cover of a restoration myth, and both of them were killed for it — Agis IV by his own ephors and colleague, Cleomenes III in exile after military defeat.

The default's price is therefore this: an arrangement that everyone has an interest in defending is an arrangement that nobody has the standing to alter, and such orders do not reform. They are replaced — by an outside power, or by someone who breaks the arrangement in order to save it and is destroyed for the attempt. That proposition should be carried into every other case in this collection, because it predicts something checkable: the more perfectly a hierarchy has distributed its shares, the more certainly its eventual crisis will be resolved from outside itself.

Reading elite coordination against the framework

Three findings, in descending order of confidence.

The first is that the collection's central observation about durable hierarchies is not a modern reconstruction imposed on the past. Aristotle states it in the fourth century BC as a general condition of constitutional permanence — that all the parts of the state must wish the arrangement to exist and continue — and works it out share by share for the case in front of him. The framework should record that its own principal claim was available to, and articulated by, a contemporary analyst of one of the orders it studies. That is not proof of the claim, but it is a considerable strengthening, and it also means the mechanism was **visible to the people operating it**. The Spartans were not unconsciously coordinating. Their most acute contemporary could explain to them why their constitution held, and the arrangement continued to hold anyway, which is worth noting against any assumption that these mechanisms depend on the participants not seeing them.

The second is the finding about the manufactured counter-elite, and it sharpens the framework's account of where fracture comes from. The general claim is that change is driven by people with standing and means who have stopped benefiting. Sparta shows a

specific and dangerous version: **an order whose membership rule can only subtract will generate its own counter-elite as a by-product, at a rate it cannot control, composed of exactly the people it has trained best.** Cinadon was not an outsider who acquired capability. He was Spartan formation applied to a man and then withdrawn from him, and his answer under interrogation — that he wished to be inferior to no one in Lacedaemon — is the voice of the arrangement's own product asking to be let into what it was built for. Any hierarchy with a costly, recurrent qualification for membership and no route of readmission is running the same production line.

The third is the cost of the default itself, stated above and offered as the module's contribution: perfection of the default forecloses reform. Sparta is the strongest case the collection is likely to find, because the coordination was so successful that it survived four centuries without a tyrant, and so complete that the state could not act on a problem it had correctly diagnosed and watched kill it slowly for a hundred and fifty years.

One thing should not be smuggled into any of this. The arrangement was not a conspiracy and the men in it were not cynics. A Spartan elder who had spent seventy years earning the regard that made him an elder, a king who sacrificed before dawn on his people's behalf, an ephor serving his one year and going home — these were men holding positions they believed in, inside an order they had been formed from the age of seven to regard as given by Apollo and unchanged since the founding. That their several defences of their several positions added up to the defence of an arrangement resting on the compelled labour of a much larger population is not something any of them had to intend, or notice, or want. It is what the arrangement was for, and the fact that it required no one's bad faith is the most important thing about it.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Aristotle, *Politics* 2.9, is quoted in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885) for the passage on the ephoralty holding the state together and on all the parts of the state needing to wish the constitution to exist, with the shares of kings, nobles and people set out; for the criticism that the mind grows old as well as the body and that the elders are unaccountable; for the childishness of the election methods; for the ephors being chosen from the whole people and thereby open to bribery; and for the fall of the citizen body below a thousand, the city sinking under a single defeat and want of men being their ruin. H. Rackham's rendering of the same passage at 1270b is consulted and agrees in substance. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 15, is quoted in E. C. Marchant's translation (1925) for the monthly exchange of oaths and their wording, and paraphrased for the royal honours and the ephors' remaining seated in the king's

presence. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 3.3.4–11, is paraphrased throughout for the conspiracy of Cinadon: his description as fine in body and brave in spirit but not one of the *homoioi*, the counting of the Spartiates in the market-place against more than four thousand others, the composition of the conspiracy, and his statement under interrogation that he acted in order to be inferior to no one in Lacedaemon. Herodotus 6.56–58 on the royal privileges and 6.51–52 on the feud between the two houses are paraphrased from the nineteenth-century English versions. Thucydides is used in Richard Crawley's translation (1874): 1.18 on four hundred years of unchanged government and freedom from tyrants, 1.134 on the death of Pausanias the regent, and 5.23.3 for the clause of the peace of 421 providing Athenian assistance in the event of a servile rising, which is paraphrased rather than quoted. Plutarch's *Lysander*, on the decarchies, the honours voted to Lysander in the Aegean cities and the alleged scheme to open the kingship, is used with the plot explicitly flagged as tradition; the *Agis* and *Cleomenes* supply the fate of the two reforming kings. Polyaenus preserves a brief independent notice of the Cinadon affair. Modern scholarship is credited where used: Stephen Hodkinson on the property mechanism behind the shrinking citizen body, established in Module 2 and relied on here; Paul Cartledge and the general scholarly discussion of *oliganthropia*; the ongoing debate over the ephorate's origins and the historicity of the Rhetra's rider, noted rather than resolved. The proposition that perfection of the default forecloses reform, and the account of the manufactured counter-elite, are this study's own and are offered for testing against the other cases in the collection.

GREATER, IN THAT IT WILL LAST LONGER

Module 9 · Plurality or Foreclosure — the one real liberty in this case, the factional bargain that produced it, the four centuries in which nothing further accreted, and how to tell a protection from a piece of asset management

Where to look

Liberties are not made by the people who most need them. A man with nothing to withhold has nothing to bargain with, and no hierarchy has ever handed out protections because the people at the bottom asked. What produces a protection is a fight *inside* the hierarchy — a faction with standing and means that needs allies it cannot simply command, and that pays for them with a concession neither side expects to be permanent. The concession outlives the fight. It becomes a precedent, then a custom, then a right, and centuries later it is described as though it had been a principle all along.

So the question for Sparta is not whether it was free. It is: what did the men at the top ever have to buy, from whom, and what did the purchase leave behind?

The answer is unusually clean. There was one such purchase, it is documented in the buyer's own reported words, and after it almost nothing further accreted for four hundred years.

The purchase

The office that made an ordinary Spartiate a participant rather than a subject was the ephorate — five magistrates, elected annually from the whole citizen body, ineligible for re-election, empowered to arrest a king. The previous module established what it was worth in structural terms: it is the share that gave every man in the ranks a stake in the constitution's continuance.

Where did it come from? The tradition attributes it to the reign of Theopompus, the king under whom Messenia was taken, roughly a century and a half after the constitution's supposed founding. Plutarch gives the story and, more valuable, the reasoning:

> *This king, they say, on being reviled by his wife because the royal power, when he handed it over to his sons, would be less than when he received it, said: 'Nay, but greater, in that it will last longer.'*

Aristotle reports the same exchange independently in the *Politics*, in a chapter on how monarchies are preserved, and draws the same conclusion: that the diminution of royal power had the long-run effect of strengthening the kingship.

Then Plutarch supplies the comparison that shows what was actually being bought. By yielding, he says, royalty at Sparta escaped the perils that destroyed its neighbours — the Spartan kings did not suffer what the Messenians and the Argives inflicted on theirs, *who were unwilling to yield at all or remit their power in favour of the people*. Three neighbouring Dorian communities, comparable in origin and territory, faced the same pressure from below at roughly the same period. Two sets of kings refused to concede and were destroyed. One conceded an annual magistracy open to every citizen, and his line held its throne for another five hundred years.

That is the mechanism in its purest documented form, and every element the framework looks for is present. The concession was made **from strength**, not weakness — Theopompus was the victorious king of a state that had just conquered Messenia. It was **calculated**: the exchange with his wife, whatever its historicity as an anecdote, preserves the calculation exactly, and Aristotle's independent report shows the calculation was the standard ancient reading. And it was made in the presence of a **live internal threat**, which is documented from a third direction: Aristotle, discussing faction in aristocracies, says that during the Messenian war certain Spartiates ruined by the fighting demanded a redistribution of the land, and cites Tyrtaeus's *Eunomia* as his evidence. Men who had been bankrupted by a twenty-year war, and who were also the men who had won it and who carried the spears, wanted the settlement reopened. What they got instead was an office.

That is a very good trade from the apex's point of view and it should be recognised as one. It cost the kings some authority and cost the landholders nothing at all. It gave every Spartiate a permanent, renewable, cost-free claim on the highest power in the state, and thereby converted a distributive demand — give us land — into a constitutional one, which is a far cheaper thing to satisfy.

The clause, and the clause that took it back

The other archaic residue is in the Great Rhetra, and it comes with its own erosion attached, which makes it the more instructive of the two.

The Rhetra's operative clause declares that *the people must have the deciding voice and the power*. That is as clear a statement of popular sovereignty as any archaic Greek text contains, and it is presented as an oracle from Delphi. Then, Plutarch says, when the people took to altering the motions put before them by addition and subtraction, Kings Polydorus and Theopompus inserted a rider: if the people should adopt a distorted motion, the elders and kings should have power to dissolve the session. And they persuaded the city that the god had authorised the addition.

Notice what the rider does and does not remove. It does not take away the vote. It takes away the *amendment* — the right of the assembly to change what is put to it rather than merely accept or reject. What survives is a real decision on a question framed by somebody else.

This is worth dwelling on because it corrects an assumption that the word *residue* can encourage. Concessions do not simply accumulate. They are fought over afterwards, and what remains is a net line rather than a ratchet — the high-water mark minus whatever the other side could recover once the emergency passed. The Spartan assembly's power is exactly such a line: a genuine vote, permanently, on a genuine question, with no power to shape the question. And the same king who conceded the ephorate is named as one of the two who clawed back the amendment. Theopompus appears on both sides of the ledger, which is what one would expect of a man managing a factional settlement rather than granting rights.

What the vote was worth in practice

It would be easy to dismiss the Spartan assembly as theatre, and the record does not permit it.

In 432 the assembly met to decide whether Athens had broken the treaty. Archidamus, one of the two kings, argued at length against war — cautiously, on grounds of resources and of Athenian naval power, and he was right, as the next twenty-seven years demonstrated. Sthenelaidas, one of the five ephors, answered him in a few sentences and argued for war. The assembly then voted, in the Spartan way, by shouting. Sthenelaidas declared that he could not tell which shout was louder and ordered a physical division: those who thought the treaty broken to stand on one side, those who did not on the other. They rose and separated, and the majority for war was large.

Every element of that is real. A king was publicly opposed and publicly defeated by an ephor. The decision was made by the assembled citizens and it determined the course of Greek history. And the procedure had enough integrity that when the result was unclear it was resolved by counting bodies rather than by declaration.

It also shows the limits precisely. The question came to the assembly already framed; Thucydides notes that Sthenelaidas called the division not because he was in doubt but because he wanted to make the war party's size visible and thereby inflame it. The presiding magistrate had discretion over the procedure and used it to shape the outcome. And nobody in the room could have proposed a third option. That is what a residue looks like after four centuries of settlement: a genuine power, exercised genuinely, inside a channel the holder did not cut.

Protection from the apparatus, and where it stopped

The most revealing liberty in this case is a rule of procedure, and its significance lies entirely in who it covered.

When the ephors first suspected Pausanias, the victor of Plataea, of intriguing with Persia, they did not act. Thucydides explains why: the Lacedaemonians had a custom of not taking any hasty and irrevocable decision about a Spartan man without indisputable proof. They waited, gathered evidence, and moved only when they had a witness who had heard the man incriminate himself. Even then, when they came to arrest him and he fled into the temple of Athena of the Bronze House, they did not drag him out. They walled him in, removed the roof and waited, and brought him out only when he was at the point of death, so that he should not die inside the sanctuary.

Set beside that the procedure available for a helot. The magistrates who required incontrovertible evidence before moving against one Spartan had, on entering office that same year, formally declared war on the entire helot population — so that killing any of them would require no evidence, no charge, no hearing and no pollution. Young men were sent into the countryside at night to kill whom they found. Two thousand were selected by a public offer of freedom and disposed of by a method no one could describe.

One state, in the same year, under the same magistrates: due process so scrupulous it would not let a traitor die under a roof he had claimed, and a standing authorisation to kill without any process at all. There is no better statement anywhere in this collection of what the boundary of a political community actually *is*. It is not a line on a map or a matter of residence or even of law in the abstract. It is the line at which procedure begins.

Where the residue stopped accreting, and why

After the archaic settlement, almost nothing further was won. The ephorate and the assembly's vote date to the seventh century or earlier; the four hundred years that

follow produce no new protection, no extension of membership by rule, no tribunate, no code, no appeal.

The contrast with Rome is worth making because the two orders start from similar material. Rome's plebeians extracted the tribunate, then a written code, then intermarriage, then access to the consulship, then the binding force of their own assembly's decisions — a two-century sequence of concessions, each wrung from a patrician order that needed something the plebeians could withhold. What they could withhold was themselves: the secession, the refusal to march. And Rome, decisively, kept admitting people — freedmen, Latins, Italians, provincials — so that the citizen body grew while Sparta's shrank.

Sparta's excluded had no equivalent lever, and the reason is structural. The *hypomeiones* could not secede, because there was nowhere in Laconia to secede to and no separate body they could constitute. The *perioikoi* had the leverage of military service but were dispersed across dozens of separate towns with no common institution in which to combine. The helots had numbers and nothing else. And — this is the point that joins this module to the last — no faction *above* ever needed to buy them. The default described in Module 8 was so complete that after the archaic period no part of the Spartan apex was ever in a position where it had to purchase support from outside its own ranks. The kings were doubled and checked; the ephors rotated annually; the elders were unaccountable and old; the assembly consented but could not initiate. Nobody could accumulate enough power to be worth allying with, and nobody was ever so threatened that he had to go looking for allies below.

Liberty accretes where a faction inside a hierarchy needs allies it cannot compel. Sparta's arrangement was designed to ensure no faction ever reached that position, and it succeeded — which is why the same completeness that made the order the most stable in Greece made it the most closed. Stability and illiberality here are not two facts about Sparta. They are one fact seen from two sides.

The route in, and what it produced

Membership could, in principle, be granted. Aristotle records that in the days of the ancient kings the Spartans used to give the rights of citizenship to strangers, and that consequently, despite their long wars, they experienced no lack of men. The mechanism existed, was remembered, and had been abandoned. By Aristotle's own day the citizen body was under a thousand, and the city fell to a single defeat.

What replaced a rule was discretion. Boys of non-citizen status were sometimes raised alongside Spartiates and could rise very high — Lysander, who won the war and took Athens, is reported to have been one of them; so, in the tradition, was Gylippus,

who saved Syracuse. Freed helots were enrolled as a distinct military class and settled in border districts. Cleomenes III, in the crisis of 223, sold citizenship to any helot who could pay five Attic minas, and six thousand did.

Each of these is admission, and none of them is a rule. All were discretionary, ad hoc, granted by a magistrate or a king for a purpose, and revocable in the sense that no one admitted could point to a procedure that had entitled him. And the case supplies a striking consequence. The men who came in by that route are precisely the ones who most strained the arrangement — Lysander, whose Aegean client network and rumoured designs on the kingship were the sharpest internal threat of the classical period; and, from the other side of the same boundary, Cinadon, who had every capability the order could confer and no entitlement whatever.

Where admission is discretionary rather than rule-governed, the admitted destabilise rather than stabilise, because a man who owes his standing to a patron has an interest in his patron and none in the procedure — there being none. A rule creates loyalty to the rule. A favour creates loyalty to the man who granted it, and a grievance in everyone who did not receive it.

Protections that were not liberties

Three rules restrained Spartiates in their dealings with helots. A master could not sell a helot beyond the frontiers. He could not free one at will. And the tradition preserves a curse laid on any master who exacted more than the customary render.

Every one of these benefits the helots, and it would be easy to enter them in the liberty column. They do not belong there, and separating them out yields the diagnostic this module offers the framework.

Their origin is not a concession to helots, who had no forum in which to demand anything and no capacity to withhold anything except by revolt. It is the collective interest of the conquerors in a labour force they had no means of replacing — restraints imposed by Spartiates on Spartiates, to stop individual masters from consuming a permanent asset for a private windfall. They are of the same family as the rules a company makes about its own equipment.

The test that separates the two is procedural. **A protection is a liberty only if the beneficiary can invoke it.** Could a helot go anywhere, before anyone, and say: this man has demanded more than the customary render, and is selling my son to Corinth? There is no forum, no magistrate, no procedure and no recorded instance of anything of the kind. The rules were enforced, when they were enforced, by other Spartiates acting on the community's interest, at their discretion, for their own reasons. That is asset management, and calling it a right obscures the only thing about it worth

knowing — which is that the helots' security depended entirely on their masters' continuing to find their preservation profitable, and would evaporate the moment it stopped.

This diagnostic should be carried into the other cases in the collection, where the same confusion is easy to make. Colonial regimes are full of protective ordinances — limits on hours, prohibitions on flogging, requirements of registration — that read as rights and function as inventory control. The question to ask of each is not what it forbids but who can raise it, in front of whom.

The exception, and it is a real one

One genuine plurality in Spartan life came from no factional bargain at all, and honesty requires it be recorded.

Spartan women held property in their own right, inherited it, brought it in dowry and kept it; Aristotle complains that nearly two-fifths of the country belonged to them, and that a man might bestow an heiress on whomever he pleased. They were trained physically, in running and in contests of strength, on the reasoning that vigorous mothers bear vigorous children. They managed estates for years at a time while the men were in the field or at the mess. One of them, Cynisca, sister of a king, entered a chariot team at Olympia and won.

None of this was granted in a bargain, and none of it was framed as a liberty by anybody. It is a by-product of two other arrangements made for other reasons: a property regime that transmitted land by ordinary inheritance and dowry, and a military regime that removed adult men from the household for most of their lives. The framework should note the category. **Liberties can be structural residues of arrangements made for unrelated purposes, and these are the most durable kind, because there is no faction whose defeat would remove them.** They are also the least articulated, which is why Spartan women's position appears in the record almost entirely as complaint from foreign moralists rather than as any right the Spartans themselves ever wrote down.

Reading plurality against the framework

Sparta gives the framework's liberty question an unusually crisp answer, because the case is small, the record is long, and the variable moved only once.

There was one real concession, made from strength by a king who calculated that a smaller kingship held longer was worth more than a larger one held briefly, at a moment when Spartiates ruined by the Messenian war were demanding land. It

produced an office open to every citizen with power over the kings, and it worked exactly as intended for both parties: the kings kept their thrones for five centuries while the Messenian and Argive kings lost theirs, and the ordinary Spartiate got a permanent stake in a constitution that never gave him land. Alongside it survived a vote, real but unamendable, and a rule of procedure protecting Spartiates from the state's own magistrates.

Then nothing, for four hundred years — and the reason is the finding this module contributes. **The accretion of liberties requires a faction inside the hierarchy that needs allies it cannot compel; an order that has perfected its internal balance has abolished the conditions under which anyone must ever go looking.** Sparta's default was so complete that no king, no board of ephors, no group of elders was ever weak enough to have to bid for support from below. What is usually described as Spartan conservatism is better read as the absence of anyone in a position to need help.

Two smaller instruments are offered with it. The first is the invocation test: a protection counts as a liberty only where the beneficiary can raise it, before someone, by a procedure — otherwise it is the management of an asset, however genuinely it benefits the person protected. The second is that discretionary admission produces destabilising members rather than stabilising ones, because a man admitted by favour is bound to his patron and a man admitted by rule is bound to the rule.

And the last observation is the one this study keeps returning to. Everything described in this module — the ephorate, the vote, the division into two groups on the ground, the scruple about condemning a man without proof — was real, and was as real as any liberty in the archaic Greek world. It applied to a few thousand men. Four miles away, and on the far side of a mountain, a much larger number of people lived under the same government with no vote, no office, no proof required before their deaths, and no forum in which to say so. Both facts are the same constitution. The line between them is where the procedure started, and nothing in four centuries moved it.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* is quoted in Bernadotte Perrin's translation (1914): chapter 7 for the appointment of the first ephors under Theopompus, for the king's reply to his wife that the kingship he handed on would be greater in that it would last longer, and for the comparison with the Messenian and Argive kings who were unwilling to yield; chapter 6 for the Rhetra's clause giving the people the deciding voice, for the rider inserted by Polydorus and Theopompus, and for the persuasion of the city that the god had authorised it. Aristotle's independent report of the Theopompus exchange, at *Politics* 1313a, is noted and paraphrased. Aristotle is otherwise quoted and paraphrased in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885): *Politics* 2.9 for the tradition that the ancient

kings granted citizenship to strangers and that no lack of men was therefore felt, for the fall of the citizen body below a thousand, and for the property of Spartan women; *Politics* 5 for faction arising from unequal property, with the Spartiates ruined by the Messenian war demanding redistribution and Tyrtaeus's *Eunomia* cited as the evidence. Thucydides is used in Richard Crawley's translation (1874) and paraphrased: 1.79–87 for the debate of Archidamus and Sthenelaidas, the vote by acclamation, and the physical division of the assembly, with Thucydides' own observation that Sthenelaidas called the division to make the war party's numbers visible; 1.132–134 for the ephors' reluctance to take irrevocable action against a Spartan man without indisputable proof, and for the manner of Pausanias's death at the temple of Athena of the Bronze House. The material on the ephors' annual declaration of war, the *krypteia* and the two thousand helots is as sourced in Module 1. Plutarch's *Cleomenes* 23 for the sale of freedom to helots at five Attic minas is as sourced in Module 6. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 3.3, for Cinadon, is as sourced in Module 8. The traditions that Lysander and Gylippus were of *mothax* status are late and are given as tradition. The restrictions on selling and freeing helots are reported through Ephorus and later authors and are given as report; the curse on exceeding the customary render comes from Plutarch's *Moralia*. Cynisca's Olympic chariot victories are attested by Pausanias and by a surviving dedicatory epigram, and are cited rather than quoted. Modern scholarship is credited where used: Stephen Hodkinson on the property regime underlying the position of Spartan women; Paul Cartledge on the *perioikoi* and on Spartan admission practices; the long-running scholarly debate on the date and origin of the ephorate, which is unresolved and is presented as such — Herodotus attributes it to Lycurgus, Aristotle and Plutarch to Theopompus, and the office is absent from the Rhetra and from Tyrtaeus, which some take as evidence against the early date. The three propositions advanced here — that liberty accretes only where a faction needs allies it cannot compel, that a protection is a liberty only where the beneficiary can invoke it, and that discretionary admission destabilises where rule-governed admission binds — are this study's own and are offered for testing against the other cases in the collection.

THE EPHORS DID NOT STOP THE CHORUS

Module 10 · Change and Collapse — four centuries of risings that changed nothing, an afternoon between two hoplite armies that changed everything, and a city built in a winter that ended the arrangement without a battle being fought in the country it freed

The risings that lost

Begin with the negative case, because Sparta supplies the most thoroughly documented version of it in this collection.

The largest servile rising in Greek history began at Sparta. An earthquake devastated the city in the 460s, killing a large number of Spartiates, and the helots — Messenians in the main — rose. They took Mount Ithome and fortified it. Perioikic communities joined them. Sparta was reduced to calling in outside help, including an Athenian force under Cimon, whom the Spartans then sent home in an insulting hurry because they feared what Athenians might do if they saw the situation clearly. The rebels held the mountain for years — the tradition says as much as ten — and the affair ended not in a Spartan storm but in a negotiated departure under truce, the rebels leaving the Peloponnese and being settled by Athens at Naupactus.

That is an insurrection with everything a rising is supposed to need: an overwhelming numerical majority, a defensible position, a shattered enemy, foreign sympathy, and the moment of maximum weakness. It ended with the survivors walking away, and the arrangement continued for another ninety years.

Then Pylos, in 425. An Athenian fortified base on the Messenian coast; helots deserting to it in numbers Thucydides thought significant; Messenians from Naupactus raiding Laconia in the local dialect. Sparta's response was to sue for peace and to make the removal of the Messenians from Pylos a war aim comparable to recovering its own captured citizens. Frightening, expensive, effective as leverage — and it changed nothing structurally. The peace was made, the base was given up, and the helots went on delivering barley.

Then Cinadon, in 399, examined in Module 8: a conspiracy embracing every category of Lacedaemonian except the Spartiates, organised by a capable man with access and standing, in a country where forty Spartiates in a market-place faced four thousand others. It was betrayed, and five magistrates and a handful of young

horsemen ended it in something like a week. Nobody had to be mobilised. The floor did not even flex.

Four hundred years, and the largest, angriest, best-positioned subject population in Greece never came close to altering the arrangement. This is not because the helots were passive; the record shows the opposite. It is because a rising against an intact floor loses, and the Spartan floor was the most intact in Greece.

What was actually eroding

Meanwhile the thing that would end Sparta was proceeding quietly, inside the citizen body, and it has already been reconstructed in this study.

Spartan land was private, heritable, divisible among children and carried by daughters in dowry, and it concentrated accordingly. Membership of the ruling caste required a fixed monthly contribution in kind, and a man who could not meet it lost his citizenship. A distribution that concentrated, measured against a qualification that did not move, produces a citizen body that shrinks every generation — not through catastrophe but through arithmetic.

The scale of the shrinkage is startling even allowing for the unreliability of ancient figures. Herodotus has an exiled Spartan king tell Xerxes that Sparta had about eight thousand men. Aristotle, writing a century and a half later, says the country was capable of supporting fifteen hundred cavalry and thirty thousand hoplites and that the number of Spartan citizens had fallen below a thousand. He names the cause without hesitation: the laws respecting property, and their result — *"the city sank under a single defeat; the want of men was their ruin."*

And Module 8 established why nothing was done. No organ of the Spartan state had the standing to alter the property regime: the kings could not legislate, the elders were unaccountable and appointed for life, the ephors had twelve months and no horizon, the assembly could not initiate and could be dissolved for deciding crookedly, and the whole was held to be divinely authorised and unchanged for four hundred years. The problem was correctly diagnosed by a contemporary and watched for well over a century by a state institutionally incapable of touching it.

The counter-elite that came too early

This is where the case makes its sharpest contribution, because it runs the experiment twice.

The framework's fourth crack is elite overproduction: an order that seats fewer claimants than it produces generates a surplus of capable, formed, excluded men who

turn against it and lead the crowd as fuel. Sparta produced exactly such a surplus, by an inverted mechanism — not by breeding too many heirs but by shedding seats, through a membership rule that could only subtract. The *hypomeiones* were the result, and Cinadon was their voice: fine in body, brave in spirit, employed on the state's business, not one of the similars, and wanting only to be inferior to no one in Lacedaemon.

Every ingredient the framework specifies was present in 399. A counter-elite with military competence and access. A base of the excluded running through every stratum of the country. A grievance that was structural rather than personal. And it was destroyed in days, by five annually-elected magistrates, without the army being called out.

Seventy years later a comparable fracture appeared at the top of the order and succeeded in getting as far as bloodshed — and it, too, was destroyed. What differed between the failures and the success was never the quality of the internal crack. It was whether the floor was standing.

Exhaustion

Before the floor broke there was a long overstretch, and the framework's second crack is visible in it.

After 404 Sparta found itself the master of Greece and the Aegean, with a citizen body of a few thousand men and a state that had no treasury, no coinage, no fleet of its own and no administrative class. It governed by installing garrison commanders and juntas of partisans in cities across the Greek world, which meant dispersing its scarce citizens as individual governors in places where nobody could watch them. It fought the Corinthian War against a coalition of its former allies. It kept its position in the end only by taking Persian money and endorsing a settlement, in 386, that handed the Greeks of Asia to the King.

The internal effect is recorded by the most sympathetic possible witness. Xenophon, who admired Sparta and had been its client, breaks off his account of the Lycurgan institutions to complain that in his own day Spartans are eager to hold governorships abroad, that money has crept in, and that the laws are no longer obeyed. An order whose entire extraction system had been designed to prevent the surplus from becoming portable and accumulable was suddenly handling an empire's revenue, and had no institution capable of receiving it. What arrived was not public wealth but private fortunes, in the hands of individual commanders, in a society whose citizenship was priced in barley and whose land was already concentrating.

The floor was thinning throughout. In 371 it was about to be tested by a hierarchy that had learned how to break it.

The afternoon

At Leuctra in Boeotia, in the summer of 371, a Spartan-led army met a Theban one under Epaminondas, who had massed his best troops fifty deep on his left, opposite the Spartan king. Xenophon, a hostile witness to Thebes, gives the accounting without ornament: of the Lacedaemonians as a whole nearly a thousand had been killed, and among the Spartiates themselves, of whom there were some seven hundred present, about four hundred had fallen.

Four hundred citizens in an afternoon, out of a body Aristotle would shortly describe as under a thousand. There is no clearer demonstration in this collection of what a shrinking membership means: the order could still win battles, but it could no longer afford to lose one.

And Xenophon adds the sentence that matters most for this framework. The Spartan commanders looked around and saw that the allies were one and all without heart for fighting, *"while some of them were not even displeased at what had taken place."*

That is the arrangement's outer ring, at the moment of crisis, evaluating its own position and finding the answer had changed. The Peloponnesian League had been held for two centuries by the mechanism reconstructed in Module 8 — allied oligarchies whose standing at home depended on Spartan power, defending Spartan hegemony by defending themselves. Standing on the field at Leuctra, some of those men were not sorry. When the default stops holding at the edges, it stops holding, and no amount of drill in the centre substitutes for it.

The chorus

The news reached Sparta on the last day of the Gymnopaediae, the festival at which the three choruses sang — the old men that they had once been strong, the young men that they were so now, the boys that they would be mightier than both. The chorus of men was in the theatre.

Xenophon records that the ephors, though they heard the disaster, did not stop the chorus. They let it finish. Then they sent round to the households the names of the dead, instructed the women not to make an outcry but to bear the calamity in silence, and the next day, he says, one could see the relatives of the slain going about in public with bright and cheerful faces, while the relatives of the survivors were few and downcast and kept out of sight.

The order's formation was working perfectly on the day the order died. Men whose sons had just been killed performed pride in public because that was what they had

been made to be; men whose sons had lived hid. Nothing had failed inside those people. What had failed was the number of them.

The city built in a winter

The following winter Epaminondas came south with a Theban and allied army, ravaged parts of Laconia, came within sight of an unwalled Sparta — and then did the thing that ended the arrangement, which was not a battle at all.

He crossed into Messenia and founded a city. Messene was built at the foot of Mount Ithome, with walls, and it was populated: Messenians from Naupactus, Messenians from the settlements in Sicily and Libya where the diaspora had scattered, perioikoi from the region, and helots. Sparta lost roughly half its territory and the larger part of its labour force in a single season, and no battle was fought in Messenia to take it.

This is the finding of Module 5 realised at full scale. For four centuries a helot's exit had been theoretically open — the mountain was crossable, boats put in on the coast, sanctuaries existed — and none of it had moved the ledger, because an exit is worth only what waits at the end of it, and what waited was a foreign country with no interest in him and a family he could not carry. Epaminondas did not free the helots. He did not defeat them into liberty, and he did not raise them; the record shows no great Messenian insurrection in 369. He built them somewhere to arrive, put an army behind it and walls around it, and the arrangement dissolved because the price of leaving had changed.

The decisive act in the destruction of the most durable servile order in Greece was construction, not combat.

One further detail belongs here because it closes a circle. Xenophon, our best contemporary source, the man who fought for Sparta and whose account of Leuctra has just been quoted, does not mention the foundation of Messene at all. The greatest humiliation of the order he loved is simply absent from his history, though he refers later to Messenian independence as an accomplished fact. The information regime reconstructed in Module 7 — the state that wrote nothing and left its telling to sympathetic foreigners — performed its final service at the moment of collapse, and it worked: the founding of a city of eighty years' consequence has to be reconstructed from Diodorus and from Pausanias six centuries later.

The reforms, and who attempted them

Sparta did eventually attempt the redistribution that might have saved it, a hundred years too late and with the labour base already gone. It is worth recording who attempted it.

Agis IV, in the 240s, proposed cancelling debts and cutting the land into forty-five hundred lots for Spartiates and fifteen thousand for the rest, with the citizen body replenished from perioikoi and suitable foreigners. He was a king. He was deposed by his colleague and the ephors, tried and strangled. Cleomenes III, a decade later, killed four of the five ephors, abolished the office, redistributed the land, enrolled perioikoi as citizens and later sold freedom to six thousand helots at five minas a head to raise money. He was a king. He was defeated at Sellasia by a Macedonian and Achaean army and died in exile in Egypt. Nabis, at the end of the century, freed helots and redistributed property on a wider scale than either. He was the ruler of Sparta. He was destroyed by Rome and the Achaean League, and in 188 Philopoemen pulled down the walls of Sparta and abolished the ancient institutions outright.

Three attempts at structural change, all three led from the apex, all three destroyed — twice by other Spartan elites and once and finally by foreign armies. Not one of them originated with a helot, a *hypomeion* or a perioikos, and the men who benefited most from Cleomenes' redistribution had had nothing whatever to do with bringing it about.

Reading change against the framework

The framework holds that structural change never comes from the rising of the ruled but from the fracture, exhaustion, conquest or overbreeding of the elite. Sparta is the strongest confirmation this collection is likely to obtain, because it does not merely fit the rule — it runs the control experiment internally, twice, with the variable isolated.

The internal crack appeared in 399 in textbook form: a formed, capable, excluded counter-elite with a base spanning every subject stratum, in a state whose citizen body was already collapsing. Against an intact floor it was extinguished in a week by five magistrates. The same order was destroyed seventy years later by an external hierarchy in one afternoon of hoplite fighting in which no helot appeared on the winning side. And in the interval, the subject population had staged the largest servile revolt in Greek history, held a mountain for years, deserted in thousands to a foreign base, and changed nothing at all.

The refinement the case offers is that the four cracks are not four alternative routes but a stack with a precedence order. Attrition or overproduction sets the

condition — Sparta's citizen body had been shrinking for a century and a half, and this is why four hundred dead at Leuctra was fatal when four hundred dead would not have been in 480. Exhaustion depletes the floor — an empire manned by a caste too small to man it, financed by Persian subsidy, its members dispersed as governors and returning with private fortunes. But only conquest by a rival hierarchy reliably executes, and internal fracture propagates only after one of the others has already broken the floor. Cinadon is the proof: identical fracture, intact floor, no result. Cleomenes is the second proof: a far more radical programme, carried out by a king with the army behind him, and it was reversed by a Macedonian phalanx at Sellasia.

The honest objection in *Elite Chaos* has to be granted in full here, and the Spartan evidence strengthens it rather than weakening the thesis. The helots' causal load was enormous. Four centuries of Spartan policy was shaped by them: the permanent army, the reluctance to campaign far or long, the sentries facing inward, the killing of the two thousand, the peace sued for after Pylos, the inability to garrison an empire because the men could not be spared. They were the constraint inside which the apex had to operate, and that constraint is a large part of why the apex ended up too small and too brittle to survive a bad afternoon. But they were never the agent, and the dates prove it. They had every grievance and every advantage of number in the 460s, with the city in ruins and its citizens dead under the rubble, and they lost. What they lacked then and possessed in 369 was not anger, organisation or courage. It was a Theban army and a man willing to build them a city.

And that is the last thing the case adds. In this collection the conquering hierarchy usually arrives to replace one order with another of its own. Epaminondas did something different and more final: he did not govern Messenia, tax it, or install a Theban garrison over it. He walled a hill, named a city, and went home — and the most expensive extraction system in Greece was finished, because the people it depended on now had a gate to walk through and a wall behind them when they got there.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Xenophon's *Hellenica* is quoted in Carleton Brownson's translation (1918–21): 6.4.15 for the casualties at Leuctra — nearly a thousand Lacedaemonians dead and about four hundred of the seven hundred Spartiates present — and for the allies being without heart for fighting while some were not even displeased; 6.4.16 for the arrival of the news on the last day of the Gymnopaediae with the chorus of men in the theatre, the ephors' decision not to stop it, the instruction to the women to bear the loss in silence, and the bearing of the relatives on the following day. Xenophon's *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 14, on Spartans of his own day seeking governorships abroad and on money having crept in, is paraphrased from E. C. Marchant's translation (1925).

Aristotle, *Politics* 2.9, is quoted in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885) for the country's capacity of fifteen hundred cavalry and thirty thousand hoplites, the fall of the citizen body below a thousand, and the judgement that the city sank under a single defeat and want of men was their ruin. Herodotus 7.234, for Demaratus's statement to Xerxes about the number of Spartan men, is cited rather than quoted and should be treated as a round figure. Thucydides is used in Richard Crawley's translation (1874) and paraphrased for the earthquake and the revolt, the holding of Ithome, the dismissal of Cimon's force, and the settlement of the rebels at Naupactus (1.101–103); for the desertions to Pylos and the Messenian raiding (4.41); and for Sparta's demand that the Messenians and helots be withdrawn (5.35). The material on Cinadon is as sourced in Module 8, from Xenophon, *Hellenica* 3.3. The foundation of Messene in 370/369 rests on Diodorus Siculus 15.66 and Pausanias 4.27, both of which are late and neither of which is contemporary; Xenophon's complete omission of the event is noted in the Loeb apparatus and by modern commentators and is treated here as evidence about the historian rather than about the event. Plutarch's *Agis* and *Cleomenes*, in Bernadotte Perrin's translation, supply the reform programmes and the fates of the two kings; Nabis and the settlement imposed by Philopoemen in 188 rest on Polybius and Livy and are given in outline only. Modern scholarship is credited where used: Stephen Hodkinson on the property mechanism behind *oliganthropia*; Theda Skocpol on state breakdown under fiscal-military pressure and Jack Goldstone and Peter Turchin on elite overproduction, both by way of this project's own study of change, against which the case has been read; Nino Luraghi on the composition of the population of the new Messene. Ancient casualty and population figures are reported as the sources give them and should be held loosely; the ten-year duration of the Ithome siege in particular is disputed and is given as the tradition. The proposition that the four cracks form a stack with a precedence order, and that internal fracture propagates only once the floor has been broken from outside, is this study's own refinement and is offered for testing against the other cases in the collection.

THE ONLY NUMBER ANYONE WROTE DOWN

Module 11 · The Grim Accounting — four centuries of an order whose dead cannot be counted, a metabolic note that was never signed, and a forgetting that ran in both directions because nobody had been left the means of remembering

The one figure in the ledger

There is exactly one large casualty figure in the whole history of this arrangement, and everything about it is instructive.

Diodorus, describing the year 464: a great and incredible catastrophe befell the Lacedaemonians, for great earthquakes occurred at Sparta, the houses collapsed from their foundations, and *more than twenty thousand Lacedaemonians perished*. Plutarch adds that all but five houses in the city were thrown down.

Consider what that number is. It counts the conquerors, not the conquered. Its cause is a fault line, not a policy. It comes from a historian working from Ephorus, whose taste for large figures was noted in antiquity and is not disputed now; modern scholarship treats it as a substantial exaggeration. And it is the only quantified mass death in four hundred years of the most thoroughly coercive order in the Greek world.

Everything the arrangement itself did is unnumbered. That is the finding of this module, and the rest of it is an attempt to say honestly what can and cannot be entered in the column.

What can be counted

The sword ledger, set out with what actually survives:

Spartan dead are countable, sometimes to the man. Three hundred at Thermopylae. At Sphacteria, two hundred and ninety-two prisoners taken, of whom a hundred and twenty were Spartiates. At Leuctra, nearly a thousand Lacedaemonians killed, of whom about four hundred were Spartiates out of some seven hundred present. Individual tremblers are named — Aristodemus, Pantites. The record is not merely adequate; it is precise, and it is precise because Spartiate deaths mattered to men who wrote.

Helot dead are not countable at all. Two thousand disappeared in 424, and we have that figure only because Thucydides thought the episode worth an aside. An unknown

number of suppliants were taken from the sanctuary at Taenarum and killed. The *krypteia* operated for an unknown span of years, with an unknown number of young men, killing an unknown number of people annually — Plutarch says the strongest of those working in the fields, and gives no figure because no figure existed. The twenty-year war of conquest, the second war, the revolt of the 460s and its suppression, the deportations, the punitive expeditions: no numbers, in any source, for any of them. And the annual beatings that Myron reports were administered on a schedule rather than for an offence — which is to say the arrangement inflicted a fixed quantity of violence per person per year, forever, and nobody wrote down the quantity or the number of persons.

The shape of the ledger is the shape of the arrangement. The people whose deaths were recorded are the people whose lives had procedure attached to them. The line established in Module 9 — that the boundary of a political community is the line at which procedure begins — reappears here as the boundary of the historical record, and it is the same line. Where there was a trial there is a name; where there was a declaration of war there is a blank.

A different unit

If deaths cannot be counted, something else can, and this study proposes it as the honest alternative.

The size of the helot population is genuinely unknown and heavily disputed. Herodotus's seven attendants per Spartiate at Plataea has been used for two centuries as a demographic multiplier and will not bear it; Thomas Figueira and Walter Scheidel have produced careful modern estimates from carrying capacity and from the number of *kleroi* the two regions could support, and they differ from each other substantially. What the specialists agree on is an order of magnitude: a population in the high tens of thousands to the low hundreds of thousands across Laconia and Messenia at the height of the arrangement, against a Spartiate body that ran from perhaps eight thousand in the early fifth century down to under a thousand by Aristotle's day.

Take even the low end of that range, across the three and a half centuries between the conquest and Leuctra, and the arithmetic that follows is not a body count but it is an accounting. It is a figure in the tens of millions of person-years — lives lived, whole, from birth to death, under a legal condition in which the killing of the person living them required no charge, no evidence, no hearing and no explanation, because the magistrates had declared war on him in advance.

Where the dead cannot be counted, count the condition. This is offered to the framework as a general instrument, because Sparta is not the only case in this collection

where the bodies were never numbered and the temptation is therefore to leave the column empty or to invent a figure. Condition-years are calculable from population estimates and durations, both of which usually survive; they do not pretend to a precision the record cannot support; and they measure the thing that actually characterises such an order, which is not a massacre but a permanent state.

The metabolic column, and what is not in it

The framework asks a second question, and Sparta answers it in a way that runs against expectation.

The question is whether the order's coordination lifted the population above the land's natural carrying capacity — through intensive agriculture, irrigation, storage, distribution, market integration — so that when the coordination broke, the note fell due and was paid in famine and disease. It is a real mechanism and it has done a great deal of the killing in this collection.

Sparta owed nothing, and the reason is the finding of Module 6. This order built no irrigation works, no terracing programme, no drainage, no granaries, no roads, no ports, no coinage, no market integration, and no city. It did not intensify Messenian agriculture; it took a share of what was already being grown, by cultivators using methods they had inherited, on land that had been farmed the same way before the Spartans arrived. The entire surplus was consumed as food, in the evening, in a room. There was no accumulated capital of any kind — Aristotle's empty treasury — and therefore no productive apparatus whose removal could hurt anybody.

The prediction is testable and the test exists. If the arrangement had lifted Messenia above its natural carrying capacity, its removal in 369 should have produced hunger, depopulation and disorder. What the archaeology shows is the opposite. The Pylos Regional Archaeological Project finds a clear increase in settlement and land use in south-western Messenia after the liberation, with substantially more sites in the countryside in the Hellenistic period than in the Archaic and Classical. Susan Alcock's regional work finds denser settlement after Spartan rule than under it. The new city enclosed some two hundred and ninety hectares within walls that Pausanias, half a millennium later, still called the strongest in Greece. There is no famine in the record, no die-off, no collapse. The Messenians farmed the same land, kept the whole crop, and there were more of them on it.

And the case supplies its own control, in the same region, at the other end of the study. Eight centuries earlier the palace at Ano Englianos burned, and Messenia entered four hundred years of thin, discontinuous settlement — the depopulated landscape described in this study's opening. *That* order had added something: a redistributive

centre with stores, assessed districts, organised labour and administered exchange. Its removal called the note in full, and the region paid it for four centuries.

The contribution follows, and it inverts the usual reading: metabolic debt is a function of what an order added to productive capacity, not of what it extracted. A regime that irrigates, terraces, stores and distributes lends its subjects a population they could not otherwise carry, and the loan is called when the regime falls — which is why the fall of an intensively administered order is so often the worst thing that ever happened to the people under it. A purely extractive regime that builds nothing lends nothing, and its collapse can be, for the governed, a straightforward gain. Sparta was the second kind. The test to apply in the other cases is not the severity of the extraction but the presence of the works: look for the canal, the terrace, the granary, the seed distribution, the road. Where they exist, expect the note. Where the order took a share of an inherited agriculture and consumed it, expect no die-off, and be prepared for the possibility that the end of a very cruel arrangement cost the ruled nothing at all.

The forgetting, in both directions

The last part of the accounting is the one the framework asks for and it is stranger here than usual, because the forgetting was not one-sided.

The Spartans forgot first and most thoroughly. By the classical period the arrangement was not a conquest at all in their own account of it but the furniture of reality: a constitution given by Apollo, unchanged for four hundred years, under which the helots were simply what helots were. The taking was remembered — Tyrtaeus was recited to the army in the king's tent — but remembered as endurance rather than as acquisition. Men heard, before battle, that their fathers' fathers had fought nineteen years and that in the twentieth the enemy fled from Ithome. What they were not told, because nobody thought it needed telling, was that the men in the fields outside were the descendants of the people who had fled.

The Greek world forgot next, and more consequentially. Sparta became the standard of good order — the city with no tyrant, the constitution philosophers borrowed from, the discipline that everyone admired and nobody copied. The helots were not concealed; Herodotus, Thucydides, Critias, Xenophon and Aristotle all discuss them. But they are discussed as a *technical defect* in an otherwise admirable arrangement — a source of insecurity, a management problem, an argument against that particular form of property. Not one surviving Greek writer treats them as a reason to think less well of Spartan *eunomia*. The violence was in plain view and had already stopped counting as an objection.

And the modern world forgot most completely of all, which needs no demonstration beyond the survival of the adjective.

Then the strange part. The Messenians did not remember either. They could not, because — as Module 7 established — four centuries of subjection had left them no means of record, and what they possessed in 369 was not a preserved history but an absence to be filled. The past that filled it was substantially constructed: heroes, oracles, sieges, a national epic assembled in the Hellenistic period and reaching us through Pausanias six hundred years later. Nino Luraghi's work has shown how much of Messenian identity was made during and after the subjection rather than carried through it, and the debate between continuists and discontinuists remains open. One detail is worth recording on its own: the new city's commemorations celebrate the ancient wars and the liberation, and do not commemorate the four centuries in between. The period actually lived by the people who founded the city is the one part of the past that has no monument.

Where an order withholds the means of record from its subjects, the forgetting runs both ways. The beneficiaries forget in the direction of virtue; the victims, having nothing to remember with, forget in the direction of epic, and the past they build afterwards is assembled largely out of the conqueror's materials — his poets, his sanctuaries, his chronology. This should be carried into the other cases in the collection, because it complicates a comfortable assumption: that the oppressed retain the true account and the powerful suppress it. Sometimes nobody retains it, and the recovered memory that eventually appears is a construction with its own politics, which does not make it false but does make it evidence about the moment of its making rather than about the centuries it describes.

What is owed to the reader

This module cannot give a number and will not invent one. Between the eighth century and 369 an unknown number of people — probably in the tens of thousands, possibly far more — were killed by the arrangement described in this study: in its two wars of conquest, in the suppression of its revolts, in the nightly work of its young men, in the deportations, in the disappearance of the two thousand, and in the ordinary attrition of a population beaten annually on a schedule. Not one of those deaths was recorded by anyone with an interest in recording it. The best this study can do is to state the magnitude of the condition, name the events that are attested, and decline to convert an absence of evidence into a figure.

Reading the accounting against the framework

Three findings, and the first is the one this study did not expect.

Metabolic debt tracks what an order built, not what it took. Sparta extracted from two regions for three and a half centuries and left no productive apparatus behind, so its fall called in nothing; the archaeology shows Messenia with more people on more land within a generation of the liberation. The same region's earlier order — the palace state that administered sixteen districts and kept written accounts — did lend its population a capacity it could not otherwise carry, and its fall cost the region four hundred years. The two ends of this study are the same landscape running the same experiment twice with opposite results, and the variable is the works.

Where the dead cannot be counted, count the condition. Condition-years — population multiplied by duration under a stated legal condition — is a unit the surviving evidence can actually support, and it measures what such orders actually consist of. The alternative practices are worse: leaving the column blank, which understates by infinity, or estimating a body count from a battlefield ratio, which invents.

And the record's silences are structural, not accidental. We can count Spartiate dead at Leuctra to the man and cannot count helot dead in four centuries at all, and this is not an accident of preservation. It follows directly from the same boundary that ran through the constitution: procedure produced records, and the people outside the procedure produced none. The gap in the ledger is not a hole in the evidence. It is the evidence.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Diodorus Siculus 11.63 on the earthquake and the more than twenty thousand Lacedaemonians who perished is quoted in C. H. Oldfather's translation; Plutarch's report that all but five houses fell is paraphrased, and both figures are flagged as probably deriving from Ephorus and as regarded by modern scholarship, since at least the early twentieth century, as exaggerated. Thucydides in Richard Crawley's translation (1874) supplies the two hundred and ninety-two prisoners from Sphacteria including a hundred and twenty Spartiates, and the two thousand helots of 4.80. Xenophon's *Hellenica* 6.4.15, in Carleton Brownson's translation, supplies the Leuctra figures. Herodotus provides Thermopylae, Aristodemus and Pantites, and the seven helots to each Spartiate at Plataea, the last cited only to be set aside as a demographic multiplier. Plutarch's *Lycurgus* 28, in Bernadotte Perrin's translation (1914), supplies the *krypteia*'s method and its selection of the sturdiest, with no figure attached; Myron of Priene on the scheduled annual beatings survives through Athenaeus and is paraphrased with his hostility noted. Modern scholarship is credited and paraphrased:

Thomas Figueira and Walter Scheidel on helot demography, whose estimates differ substantially and are given here only as an order of magnitude; Susan Alcock and the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project for the increase in rural settlement and land use in Messenia after the liberation, which is the load-bearing evidence for the metabolic finding and rests on survey data still being analysed; Nino Luraghi on the construction of Messenian memory after 369 and on the absence of commemoration of the helot centuries in the new city, with the continuist position noted as a live alternative; Stephen Hodkinson on the agrarian economy. The condition-years calculation offered here is illustrative arithmetic on contested population estimates and is presented as a method rather than as a result; readers should treat the magnitude as indicative and the underlying figures as disputed. The proposition that metabolic debt tracks an order's additions to productive capacity rather than its extractions, and the observation that withheld literacy produces two-directional forgetting, are this study's own and are offered for testing against the other cases in the collection.

NOT SO STRONG AS THE MESSENIAN WALL

Module 12 · Convergence and Divergence — the same answer reached independently in forty valleys, what this case shares with the collection and where it breaks from it, and the strongest defence of Sparta stated in full and answered

The same answer in forty valleys

Nothing about the Spartan arrangement was invented at Sparta. In the two centuries either side of 700 BC, communities across the Greek world that could not coordinate with one another, mostly did not know one another's arrangements, and had no common doctrine, arrived independently at the same solution to the same problem.

Sicyon held a population marked out by a slave's garment. Argos had its *gymnētes*, admitted to citizenship only after a catastrophe had killed the men who outranked them. Thessaly had the *penestai*. Crete had *mnoia* and *klarotai*, city after city. Syracuse had the Killyrioi; Byzantium held the Bithynians in a relation a later historian said was the same as Sparta's with the helots; Heraclea Pontica had the Mariandynians. Hans van Wees, surveying the whole set, concludes that Sparta was not an anomaly but the most spectacular and best-documented instance of a form of imperialism characteristic of the archaic age.

The convergence requires no hidden hand and no spirit of the age. It requires only that a few dozen groups of armed men, each standing in a similar position with a similar narrow menu of options, mostly picked the one that paid. There were only so many things to do with a defeated neighbour who farmed good land, and leaving the farmer on it while taking the land was the option that produced income without requiring anyone to learn a new trade. A Cretan drinking song of the sixth century states the doctrine in five lines without ornament and without embarrassment: *with this I plough, with this I reap, with this I tread the sweet wine from the vine, with this I am called master of the serfs* — the spear being the implement in every clause, because it is what compels the farming.

What distinguishes Sparta is not that it made the move. It is how far it carried it, and what it had to become in order to keep what it took.

What this case shares with the collection

The machinery this collection has been assembling turns up at Sparta almost item for item, thirteen centuries before the earliest colonial case in the corpus and with no metropole, no ocean, no bureaucracy and no writing.

A founding conquest establishing a floor of organised violence that never withdraws. A settlement distributing the conquered ground among the conquerors and binding them to it. A legitimating story addressed to the people whose belief the order requires and withheld from the people whose belief it does not. Formation invested in the ruling caste, withheld from the majority, and thereby making the first cheap and the second permanently expensive. A seam between what the order's audience believes and what its subjects live. An apex whose several parts each defend the whole by defending their own share. A fracture arriving, when it arrives, from a group with standing and means that has stopped benefiting. And a collapse driven from outside by a rival hierarchy, not from below by the ruled.

The case is worth having in the collection precisely because it strips away everything the colonial cases might have made us think was essential — distance, race, documents, a metropolitan public, a modern state — and leaves the machinery running anyway.

Where it diverges, and what each divergence bought

Twelve stages of this study have each returned one finding. Set out together, they are the case's contribution.

The chair. The corpus had two answers to whether a conqueror finds a seat he can occupy: an office he can enter, or a live authority with no seizable apex. Messenia supplies a third — an apex that existed and was destroyed and never replaced. A ruin is not a variant of an absence, and it is the worst ground a conqueror can be handed if he wants revenue, because nobody is standing on it with the standing to deliver any.

The floor. A floor can rest on a monopoly of coordination rather than of arms. Sparta armed its subject population routinely and held it for three centuries, because what it monopolised was drill, the subdivided command structure and the habit of formation. Where the floor rests on arms, expect disarmament; where it rests on coordination, expect weapons tolerated and leaders hunted.

The settlement. A legal fiction is a function of an audience that must be persuaded. Sparta produced none — no charter, survey or register — because conqueror and audience were the same men in the same valley, and produced one immediately, five centuries later, when its own dispossessed citizens became an audience.

The robe. The reversed robe is not colonial. It appeared here with no metropole and no distance, which means dispensability rather than geography turns a legitimating story away from the ruled.

Formation. Formation and degradation are different instruments with opposite economics. One is capital that compounds; the other is maintenance that must be reapplied on a schedule and buys nothing beyond the moment of application. An order that substitutes the second for the first has not left a gap; it has taken on a permanent charge.

The cost column. Exit is a destination, not a door. Four centuries of a crossable mountain changed nothing; a walled city changed everything within a year. And an order's stability is not the average of its subjects' ledgers but the worst ledger in the country matched against the best exit available to the man holding it.

Extraction. The mechanism is selected by the apparatus available, not by the amount desired — a proportional share needs someone at the threshing floor, a fixed measure needs nobody. And the number of links in the chain governs how much moral work the take can be made to do; a one-link chain cannot be dressed as anything else.

Information. The effort is aimed at whoever can withdraw something the order needs, which is characteristically a field of peers. And a seam is held open not by distance but by the absence of a common medium of record between its two ends, of which withheld literacy is the most complete form.

The default. An arrangement that everyone has an interest in defending is one that nobody has the standing to alter. Such orders do not reform; they are replaced. And a membership rule that only subtracts manufactures its own counter-elite, at a rate it cannot control, out of the people it trained best.

Liberty. Protections accrete only where a faction inside the hierarchy needs allies it cannot compel; perfect internal balance abolishes the condition and therefore the liberty. A protection counts as a liberty only where the beneficiary can invoke it. And discretionary admission destabilises where rule-governed admission binds.

Change. The four cracks are not alternative routes but a stack with a precedence order. Attrition sets the condition, exhaustion depletes the floor, conquest executes, and internal fracture propagates only after one of the others has broken the floor first.

The accounting. Metabolic debt tracks what an order added to productive capacity, not what it extracted; an order that builds nothing owes nothing when it falls. And where the dead cannot be counted, count the condition.

The comparison that has to be made

No account of Sparta is honest that does not set it beside Athens, because the comparison is the foundation of the strongest case in Sparta's defence.

Athens in the fifth century held a chattel slave population that modern estimates place somewhere in the range of sixty thousand to well over a hundred thousand — the figures are contested and the higher ancient numbers are rejected. Those people were bought at market, mostly foreigners taken in war or by slavers around the Black Sea and Thrace. They could be sold at any moment, individually. They had no family the law recognised; a man's wife and children could be sold away from him and frequently were. Their evidence was admissible in Athenian courts only under torture, as a matter of routine procedure rather than of exceptional cruelty. And several thousand of them worked the silver mines at Laurium, in conditions that the Athenians themselves treated as a place one did not come back from, leased out in lots by wealthy citizens as an investment.

A Messenian helot had a wife and children who stayed with him. He had a plot he worked and lived on and a village he belonged to. He could not be sold beyond the frontiers or freed at his master's whim. He kept whatever he raised above the render. He could reach a sanctuary. He was, in the ancient formula, *between free men and slaves*, and the formula was not flattery.

On a strict comparison of conditions, a great many helots were better off than a great many Athenian slaves, and the man in the Laurium mines was worse off than anyone in this study.

The counter-position, stated fully

Here, then, is the strongest case Sparta's defenders can make, and it should be made at full strength.

First: Sparta solved the problem that destroyed nearly every other Greek city. Athens had the Thirty and the murders that followed; Corcyra had the civil war Thucydides described as the model of what faction does to a community; Argos, Corinth, Syracuse, Miletus and dozens of others went through cycles of tyranny, massacre, confiscation, exile and return. Sparta had none of it, for four hundred years. Its citizens did not kill each other, did not confiscate each other's property, did not exile each other in factions, and never produced a tyrant. That was the thing every Greek political thinker most wanted and none of the others could get, and Sparta got it.

Second: Spartan hegemony was, by the standards of the age, light. Sparta levied no tribute from its allies as Athens did. It did not garrison them in peacetime as Athens

did. It did not do at Melos what Athens did at Melos. Its allies were allies rather than subjects, and when the war began Thucydides records that the feeling of mankind was strongly on the Spartan side, because they professed to be the liberators of Hellas — a claim that other Greeks, who knew perfectly well about the helots, evidently found credible.

Third: Sparta put down tyrannies, held at Thermopylae, and commanded the allied army at Plataea. Whatever Greek liberty amounted to, it was in substantial part a Spartan product, purchased with Spartan lives, and the men who paid did so under a discipline nobody had imposed on them from outside.

Fourth: Spartan women held property, inherited it, were educated in the body, managed estates, and lived with a freedom and physical health unavailable to women anywhere else in Greece. Aristotle complained about it. He was complaining about the one place in the Greek world where women were not confined.

Fifth: the Spartans believed it. This was not a racket operated by men who knew better. It was a formed order in which people held positions they thought were right, ate the same supper as their neighbours, wore the same cloak, sent their own sons through the same brutal upbringing, and died in the line they had sung about since childhood.

Sixth and hardest: every Greek state ran on unfree labour, and the ones we admire ran on a worse kind. To indict Sparta for helotage while admiring the Athens of Pericles is to indict the milder arrangement and praise the harsher, on no better ground than that the harsher one produced the buildings and the plays.

The answer

The first five points are true and this study grants them without qualification. The sixth is true in its premise and wrong in its conclusion, and the difference is what the whole study has been about.

Take the comparison first, on its own terms. It is apt, and it does indict Athens. This framework is not an instrument for ranking villains and has no interest in defending Athenian slavery, which was in most respects worse for the individual caught in it. Laurium deserves its own study and would not come out well. Conceded entirely, with nothing held back.

But the thing Sparta did that Athens did not is precisely the thing this study exists to name, and it is not a difference of cruelty. It is a difference of *order*. Athens's slaves were foreigners bought at market, scattered across households, without a country, without a common language among themselves, without a territory they could be restored to. Sparta's were a neighbouring people held in place on their own ancestral ground, in

their own villages, speaking the local dialect, in numbers that dwarfed their masters — and held there by a state of war declared afresh every year, a nocturnal service that killed the ablest of them, sentries facing inward, the concealment of the ruling caste's own numbers, and the deliberate withholding of the means by which a people acquires a record of itself.

None of that machinery is a moral surcharge. It is what the arrangement *cost*, and it is why the two orders ended so differently. Nobody could have destroyed Athenian slavery by building a city, because a man bought in Thrace has nowhere to be restored to. Epaminondas destroyed the Spartan arrangement in a single winter by walling a hill and inviting people to it — and Pausanias, six hundred years later, walked around what they built and wrote that he had not seen Babylon or Susa, but that the walls of Ambrossos and Byzantium and Rhodes, the most strongly fortified places he knew, were *not so strong as the Messenian wall*.

That wall is the answer to the counter-position, and it is not a rhetorical one. It stands because the people who built it had a country, and they had a country because Sparta had taken one rather than buying people. An order that conquers a nation and keeps it in place has acquired something Athens never had: a subject population that can, if anybody ever gives it a gate, become a state in a season. Everything expensive and terrible in the Spartan arrangement follows from that, and so does the shape of its ending.

On the fifth point — that they believed it — the answer is the discipline this collection holds throughout. Legibility is not pardon. That the Spartiate who made a helot drink and displayed him to boys had himself been one of those boys, and had learned at seven from every adult he passed that this was what such a man was for, does not excuse the act; it explains why the act required no monster to perform it. The sincerity is not a mitigation. It is the mechanism. An order that had to be run by cynics would not have lasted a generation. This one lasted four centuries because the people running it were entirely sincere, and that is the more disturbing finding, not the more comfortable one.

And on the first point, which is the strongest: yes. Sparta solved the coordination problem, and the solution deserves full credit at the price it was bought for. Several thousand armed men with no work, no police, no written law and very unequal wealth did not divide, did not usurp, and did not kill each other, for four hundred years. No other Greek city managed it and most did not manage it for forty. But the achievement and the cost are not two separate ledgers to be netted against each other; they are the same arrangement. The coordination was purchased with the mess and the upbringing, and the mess and the upbringing were purchased with the render, and the render was

secured by the declaration of war. The absence of Spartan tyranny and the presence of the *krypteia* are the same fact seen from opposite ends. One cannot credit the first and deplore the second as though a better-behaved Sparta might have had one without the other.

Reading the whole study against the framework

The reason to have this case in the collection is that it is the control.

Every colonial study in this corpus contains features that might be doing the explanatory work, and that a reader is entitled to suspect: distance, race, industrial capitalism, a metropolitan electorate, a written bureaucracy, a documentary state. Sparta has none of them. It is Greek conquerors ruling Greek subjects across four miles and a mountain, in a pre-monetary agrarian economy, without writing, without officials, without a capital city, and thirteen centuries before anything the collection otherwise contains. And the machinery runs anyway: the floor, the settlement, the robe turned away from the ruled, the formation withheld, the seam, the default, the manufactured counter-elite, the collapse arriving from outside.

That does not prove the framework. It does mean that whatever the framework is describing, it is not an artefact of modernity, of European empire or of race, and the colonial cases are specimens of something older and more general rather than a category of their own.

The last thing this case has to give is uncomfortable and it should be said plainly rather than left as an implication. Nothing about the Spartan arrangement was hidden. Herodotus described the compelled mourning at the royal funerals. Thucydides recorded that two thousand helots were crowned and disappeared and that nobody ever knew how. Critias, an admirer, described the disabled shields and the bolted doors. Xenophon, an admirer who sent his own sons through the upbringing, wrote that the camp sentries faced inward to watch friends rather than enemies. Aristotle stated that helotage was a standing danger and that the Spartans had not found out the secret of managing their subject population. Every one of these men knew, wrote it down, and went on regarding Sparta as the model of good order — and the Greek world, reading them, went on agreeing.

The failure was not informational. Every fact required to reach a different conclusion was in public circulation, in the best-read authors of the age, for centuries. What was missing was not evidence but an audience with an interest in the question — anybody with standing who needed the two halves of Sparta to be reconciled, and who would have been worse off if they were not. There was no such person, and so the question was never pressed, and the reputation ran for two and a half thousand years.

That is the finding to carry out of this study, and it is not primarily about Sparta. An order's most dangerous inconsistency is never the one it conceals. It is the one that sits in plain view, in the standard sources, known to everyone, because no one whose opinion carries consequences has any reason to raise it.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are public-domain primary material. Pausanias 4.31.5 on the circuit of the wall at Messene, and on the walls of Ambrossos, Byzantium and Rhodes being not so strong as the Messenian wall, is quoted in W. H. S. Jones's translation (1918). The Song of Hybrias is Poetae Melici Graeci 909 Page, preserved at Athenaeus 15.695f–696a, and is quoted as in this study's opening. Thucydides 2.8.4 on the feeling of mankind favouring the Lacedaemonians as professed liberators of Hellas is quoted in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1881), and 4.80 on the two thousand helots in Richard Crawley's (1874); the Corcyrean stasis is at 3.81–84 and the Melian episode at 5.84–116, both cited rather than quoted. Aristotle's remark that the Spartans had not found out the secret of managing their subject population is quoted in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885), as are the criticisms of Spartan women's property at *Politics* 2.9. Xenophon on the sentries facing inward is quoted in E. C. Marchant's translation (1925), and Critias's report of the disabled shields and bolted doors is paraphrased from fragment 88 B 37 Diels–Kranz. Herodotus 6.58 on the royal funerals is as sourced in Module 4. All of these appear with fuller apparatus in the modules where they were first used, and the notes there govern. Modern scholarship is credited and paraphrased: Hans van Wees on the archaic Greek serf regimes and the list of comparable populations at Sicyon, Argos, Thessaly, Crete, Syracuse, Byzantium and Heraclea; the standard range of modern estimates for the Athenian slave population, which is genuinely contested and is given here as a range with the higher ancient figures noted as rejected; the ordinary Athenian judicial practice of examining slave evidence under torture, and the conditions of the Laurium mines, both of which rest on the general scholarly literature and on scattered ancient references rather than on any single quantified source; Stephen Hodkinson, Nino Luraghi, Thomas Figueira, Walter Scheidel, Susan Alcock, Nigel Kennell and Paul Cartledge, whose work underpins particular findings credited in the individual modules. E. P. Thompson's principle that law cannot legitimate unless it genuinely constrains, invoked in Module 3, governs the treatment of the liberation claim here. The twelve findings summarised in the third section are this study's own and are stated at greater length, with their evidence, in the modules from which they come; they are offered as proposals for testing against the other cases in the collection and not as conclusions the collection has already reached.